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Power and Agenda: Jiang Zemin's New Political Initiatives at the CCP's Fifteenth Congress

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The Fifteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party was the last congress held in this century and the first without strongmen. With the passing of the old revolutionaries, the Jiang Zemin-centered third-generation leadership has been challenged by China's dramatic socioeconomic changes. It not only must promote further economic growth, but also cope with numerous undesirable sociopolitical consequences. Thus, Jiang took initiatives in the following three aspects: First, he initiated an ideological campaign by calling for a third liberation of thought and using all possible means to promote the country's economic development. Second, he consolidated his "fortress" by reshuffling party personnel. Third, he attempted to reconcile demands for political reform and political stability by proposing to develop democracy within the party, institute the rule of law, and consolidate grass-roots democracy. However, whether Jiang will be capable of realizing his new agenda will depend on the test of time.

Keywords: Jiang Zemin; the CCP's Fifteenth Congress; ideological campaign; personnel reshuffling; political reform

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Power by Political Initiatives

Politics is about power, as Italian political thinker Niccolo Machiavelli argued.[1] For new leaders who do not have a base of political legitimacy, en-

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[1]See Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), *The Prince and the Discourses*, trans. Luigi Ricci and

gaging in politics is vital for a long-term career, and according to Machiavelli, a politician can acquire the greatest reputation by discovering new rules and methods.

Jiang Zemin, general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), is now in such a position. Using power to discover new methods to support his own power and the party's future was Jiang's major agenda at the CCP's Fifteenth National Congress, which was held in Beijing in September 1997.[2] In order to establish himself as the real core of the CCP power hierarchy, he has had to take the initiative in building new institutions and rules that belong to his age, and with which the party and the country can be effectively governed. Joseph A. Schumpeter states that in modern democracies, regular elections provide politicians with opportunities to initiate new political and economic agendas.[3] As China lacks such elections, the party congress becomes the most important institutional means for politicians to compete for power.[4] The CCP's Fifteenth Congress thus gave Jiang Zemin an opportunity to set forth his own agenda for China's development.

When Jiang came to Zhongnanhai in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, he attempted to maintain a balance between conservatives and reformists, even though he was personally promoted by Deng Xiaoping. For a newcomer unfamiliar with Beijing politics, Jiang's moderate political line allowed him to learn about and survive power politics. Nevertheless, with such a moderate line, Jiang tended to be rather conservative, and China's political reform lost momentum after 1989. At one time, even Deng implicitly expressed his dissatisfaction with his new heir.[5] However, after Deng's high-profile tour of South China, Jiang did not have any difficulties in following Deng's call to push economic reform further. At the CCP's Fourteenth Con-

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Christian E. Detmond (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), chap. 12. Also see Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936), chap. 1.

[2]For a full text of Jiang Zemin's report delivered at the CCP's Fifteenth National Congress on September 12, 1997, see "Hold High the Great Banner of Deng Xiaoping Theory for an All-Round Advancement of the Cause of Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics to the 21st Century," *China Daily*, September 23, 1997.

[3]Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, 2nd edition (New York: Harper, 1947), 269.

[4]Since its establishment in 1921, the CCP has survived for seventy-six years. Almost all what the CCP has called its "historical turning points" occurred at party congresses. At the Seventh Congress in 1945 in Yan'an, Mao Zedong established himself as the core of the CCP, and the Twelfth Congress enabled Deng Xiaoping to initiate various new institutions and rules for the party and thus set the course of China's development.

[5]Wu Guoguang, *Zhulu shiwuda* (The power game in China) (Hong Kong: The Pacific Century Institute, 1997), 20.

gress (1992), with strong support from Deng, Jiang was successful in establishing the "market economy" as the backbone of the CCP's ideology. By following closely Deng's reformist line, Jiang secured his position as the legitimate heir and defeated challengers such as the Yang brothers.[6] The removal of the Yang brothers was significant for Jiang's power position, as the military has played an important role in Chinese politics, and whether Jiang can bring the military under control will have a major impact on his political future. Without doubt, the purge of the Yang Shangkun-Yang Baibing network during and after the Fourteenth Congress was a turning point for Jiang's political career.[7]

During the Fifteenth Congress, Jiang was able to set forth his own agenda without pressure from elders. With the passing of Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, Peng Zhen, and other senior leaders, Jiang was now in a position of independence and autonomy, especially after being appointed as the core of the third-generation leadership at the Fourteenth Congress. The Fifteenth Congress thus offered another turning point for Jiang to secure his power.

More importantly, the Fifteenth Congress was a test to see whether Jiang could initiate new institutions and rules to govern the country and thus create a new era associated with his name and leadership, as what Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping had done before. Certainly, this congress was important for the party as well, as it was the last party congress of this century, with the next one scheduled for 2002. Throughout Chinese history, great emperors or political leaders have never given up their efforts to gain eternal glory either for themselves or for the country. For Jiang Zemin, who loves to quote great names and celebrated historic dictums, it was important to exploit the Fifteenth Congress in order to gain a position for himself and for his leadership in Chinese history. Whether he will be able to achieve such a glorious goal depends on at least the following three factors which became the major political agenda of the Fifteenth Congress:

First, in contrast to the last party congress, Jiang had to establish himself firmly as the core of the third-generation leadership without strong support from senior leaders. Second, from the party's point of view, Jiang's task went far beyond simply consolidating a Jiang-centered leadership; more important-

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[6]Before Deng's tour of South China, Jiang's position was challenged by the Yang brothers, Yang Shangkun and Yang Baibing. However, immediately after Deng's tour, Jiang made a U-turn and proposed rather radical economic reform policies. At the Fourteenth Congress, Jiang secured his position as Deng's heir, with conservatives such as Song Ping, Yao Yilin, and the Yang brothers removed from the Politburo.

[7]For a discussion of changes in military personnel, see Special Issue: "China's Military in Transition," *The China Quarterly*, no. 146 (June 1996).

ly, the Fifteenth Congress had to deal with the issue of the next generation of leadership, i.e., the fourth, or even fifth generations. Without modern mechanisms such as elections, the party congress was hence crucial in addressing the leadership succession, as an unlimited power struggle would hurt the party and bring chaos to the country. Institutionally, Jiang has now already become the most powerful figure in the Chinese power hierarchy since Mao, and how he plans to transfer his power to his successor(s) will be significant for both the party and the country.

Most importantly, Jiang had to show that he is capable of leading China into the twenty-first century. For the first three quarters of this century, China has been a turbulent country filled with revolution and power struggles. Deng Xiaoping ended the chaos, but his reforms have also resulted in dramatic changes, and the country needs a new framework and new institutions to accommodate them. Jiang therefore had to convince the Chinese people that he can meet China's domestic and international challenges and bring a bright future to the country.[8]

Let Deng's Flag Fly: Ideological Restructuring

To be proficient at letters was a necessary virtue for good Chinese emperors in the past. This heritage continued even after the CCP came to power in 1949, and it was believed that Mao Zedong became the CCP's most powerful figure was attributable to his ability to theorize. Mao himself emphasized that the CCP's major leaders have to be the party's ideological and theoretical authority; in effect, ideology has been the most crucial ingredient of the CCP's survival. As Franz Schurmann states, ideology plays the role of the glue that sticks different organizational parts of the CCP together.[9]

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[8]The significance of the Fifteenth Congress can be seen from a series of articles and commentaries recently published by the *People's Daily*, the organ of the CCP. Before the congress, the party initiated a propaganda campaign to popularize the party's reform efforts and future reform lines. See *People's Daily*, August 5, 1997 and after. One author comments that a hundred years ago the country was in the shadow of humiliation imposed by Western powers. This time everything was judged to be different, with the new leadership leading the country into a promising century, with no more humiliations such as the Opium War. See Jiang Xia, "A Time of Cross-Century," *People's Daily*, August 13, 1997.

[9]Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 1. As a matter of fact, ideology plays a complicated role in any political system: it can be used to justify and preserve the status quo, or transcend and transform it. See Karl Mannheim's classic, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1936), chap. 1. In China, which

Owing to such unique functions, ideological restructuring has always been given the highest priority by the party congress, especially during periods of power succession. For example, Deng Xiaoping restructured the communist ideology and transformed the party from a revolutionary and radical one into a reform-oriented and pragmatic one. By initiating a "first liberation of thought" campaign after he came to power in the late 1970s, Deng established a non-Maoist reform ideology and provided ideological legitimacy for his own reform agenda. At the Thirteenth Party Congress in 1987, Zhao Ziyang proposed the theory of the "primary stage of socialism" in an attempt to provide a new ideological base for China's development. Similarly, during the Fourteenth Congress, following Deng's call for a "second liberation of thought," Jiang Zemin established the theory of a "socialist market economy" as the core of CCP ideology.

At the Fifteenth Congress, Jiang encountered a situation similar to what Deng faced before. As Deng faced an age without Mao, Jiang faced an age without Deng. Without Deng, Jiang had an opportunity to establish himself as a theoretical authority within the CCP. Before the Fifteenth Congress, the CCP initiated a so-called "third liberation of thought," which entailed "letting Deng's flag fly" and reaffirming the theory of the "primary stage of socialism." The latter was originally proposed by Zhao at the Thirteenth Congress, in order to defend his reform policies and rationalize various "negative" consequences resulting from them. Zhao was out of power by the time of the Fourteenth Congress, and the theory was not mentioned, but it has now returned. What is Jiang's rationale in reemphasizing this theory?

Response to the Leftists' Challenges

It should first be noted that Jiang has encountered serious ideological challenges from the leftists. Without doubt, China's rapid economic growth has brought about enormous social problems, and for leftists such as Deng Liqun and other old ideologues, these newly emerged problems are related to Deng's development strategy of "giving priority to economic development." To cure these "diseases," they have argued that Deng's reform line must be somehow modified; otherwise, the party-state would be threatened. In particular, the leftists are concerned with three issues:

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lacks many effective modern political institutions, ideology has its unique functions. Ideology can be used to persuade people to accept the legitimacy of political power, or force party cadres and government officials to identify with the top leadership, and orient their behavior to fall in line with the central leadership's policy priorities.

First, the leftists have claimed that the strategy of decentralization has had a negative impact on state capacity. Chinese economic reform has been characterized by decentralization, with the central government delegating different aspects of economic decisionmaking power, such as fiscal and financial power, property rights, and material allocation power, to local governments, individual enterprises, and even individuals in an attempt to provide them with economic incentives to promote the country's economic growth. As a result, the local economy has boomed, but the national government has lost its capacity to coordinate local economic activities and balance regional development. Income disparities among different social groups and among regions have thus widened. For the leftists, the rise of localism, ethnic nationalism, widening income disparities, etc., have been the early signs of national disintegration. Therefore, in their view, if this direction cannot be reversed, not only the party but the whole country will be in trouble.

Second, the leftists see the rise of the middle class as a major threat to the CCP's dominant rule. Facing enormous difficulties in reforming the state sector, the central government has encouraged the development of different non-state sectors such as collectives, joint ventures, and various forms of private enterprises. Due to such a policy, dramatic changes have occurred. In terms of economic components, the state sector is now no longer dominant,[10] and the rapid development of the non-state sector appears to be irreversible. A booming non-state sector in China's coastal provinces, including Guangdong, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Shandong, has already been observed. However, in China's industrial center in the northeast, provincial government officials have attributed the slow growth of local economy to a dominant state sector. They thus have called for opening a "second front" to revive local economies, which entails introducing various forms of private economic activities.

What do these changes imply for China's political order? The leftists have been afraid that a shrinking state sector will change the socialist nature of the CCP regime, with the bourgeoisie and its representatives taking political power. According to a widely circulated *Wan Yan Shu* (literally 10,000-word letter),

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[10]The gross value of industrial output from the state sector declined from 78.5 percent of total output in 1979 to 30.9 percent in 1995, while that from the collective sector increased from 21.5 percent to 42.8 percent during the same period. Also, as of 1995, the private sector had produced 13.2 percent of China's total industrial output, while foreign and other forms of enterprises had produced 13.1 percent. See Lawrence J. Lau, "Gain Without Pain: Why Economic Reform in China Worked?" (Public Lecture, East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, July 22, 1997), 7.

> An economy of state ownership is the pillar of the Chinese state. State enterprises are where China's industrial workers are located and are sources of national revenues. The shrinking of state enterprises will necessarily lead to the weakening of the party's leading position and the decline of central power and capacity to cope with various issues, and thus pose a serious threat to the CCP regime. [Moreover], a rising private sector is increasingly becoming the backup force of a newly emerging bourgeoisie and their political demands. Historically, the rise of European bourgeoisie won in their struggle for political power based on their principle of "without representatives, without taxes." Representatives of the Chinese bourgeois have also begun to "buy" through "taxation mechanism," and "public goods" from the government such as the rule of law, order, national defense, and even democracy.[11]

For the "new leftists,"[12] the rise of the middle class has slightly different connotations: they see the possibility of the CCP regime becoming ultra-rightist. Their reasoning has been along these lines: because economic growth in China has not been achieved by privatization, economic reform has resulted in a strong bureaucratic bourgeoisie. As state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have not been privatized, China's private sector remains rather small. More importantly, rapid development of the non-state sector, including the collectives, has closely been related to the "loss of state properties." This means that government officials have often become entrepreneurs and privatized state properties. These *guanshang* (literally official-businessmen) have been a major driving force behind China's rapid growth, and the CCP regime has come to increasingly depend on such a bureaucratic bourgeoisie. Such a regime will not be capable of redistributing income among different social groups and regions, and will become more coercive toward its people.

How can this tendency be reversed? The "new leftists" are very nostalgic, appealing to Maoism and calling for their own versions of economic and political democracy. For them, economic democracy means that the government needs an egalitarianism-oriented distribution policy which will constrain the regime's ultra-rightist tendencies. Furthermore, political democracy should be achieved through institutionalizing Maoist "mass democracy." Without mass participation in the political process, the people would be unable to share the fruits of development and their interests will be ignored by the regime.[13]

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[11]See *Wan Yan Shu*, "Some Elements That Influence Our National Security," *Yazhou zhoukan* (Asiaweek) (Hong Kong), January 14, 1996, 23.

[12]The term "new left" was given by many Chinese commentators in mainland and Hong Kong. See *Yazhou zhoukan*, September 18, 1994, 26-27; and *Dangdai yuekan* (Current Affairs Monthly) (Hong Kong), November 15, 1994, 26-30.

[13]For example, see Cui Zhiyuan, "Mao Zedong's Idea of Cultural Revolution and the Restructuring of Chinese Modernity," *Hong Kong Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 7 (Spring 1996): 49-74.

Third, the leftists have also been concerned about the impact of socioeconomic changes on the CCP's ideology. No one doubts that the old ideology is no longer effective in constraining and regulating government officials' behavior, let alone people's behavior, but nothing has come to take its place. In the leftists' own words, "What was regarded right in the past is now regarded wrong; what was regarded wrong in the past is now regarded right."[14] For the "old leftists," it is a rising middle class that has invalidated the communist ideology. Many party cadres and government officials at different levels as well as intellectuals are now publicly proposing that China give up state ownership and accept private ownership; indeed, they have been a driving force that is leading the country to capitalism. More importantly, the CCP regime is undergoing change, as more and more local government positions are now being filled by people from the private sector. With enormous economic resources in hand, they are developing a noncommunist ideology.

The concerns raised by the old leftists and new leftists are not without reason. Indeed, because they have highlighted many practical issues facing the country, i.e., income disparities, worsening morale, money worship, laying off of workers, social chaos, etc., they have appealed to the people. It is in this sense that both the new left and the old left could pose a serious threat to Jiang Zemin and his leadership. Therefore, the new leadership cannot totally ignore these issues, or it will lose its ideological authority and thus the base for its political legitimacy. It is against this background that Jiang has reemphasized the theory of the "primary stage of socialism."

A Third Liberation of Thought?

Jiang Zemin has certainly seen the need to fend off leftist attacks on Deng's reform policies. However, he does not want to simply defend "Deng's flag"; more importantly, he must establish himself as the party's new theoretical authority. If Jiang is not able to defend himself and set forth his own theory of governing the country as Mao and Deng did before, his position in the party's hierarchy will be challenged.

Therefore, Jiang proposed "a third liberation of thought" prior to the Fifteenth Congress.[15] On May 29, 1997, Jiang gave a talk at the Central Party School in the presence of all major central and provincial leaders, which set

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[14]"Some Elements That Influence Our National Security," 26.

[15]Ren Huiwen, "Jiang Zemin Promotes the Third Liberation of Thought of the CCP," *Xin bao* (Hong Kong Economic Journal), August 15, 1997; also see "The Propaganda Department of the CCP Calls for the Third Liberation of Thought," *Ming Pao* (Hong Kong), August 12, 1997.

the tone for the upcoming congress.[16] After that talk, the CCP's propaganda machine initiated a campaign to popularize the theme of the "third liberation of thought" in an attempt to create a favorable atmosphere for Jiang to be a theoretical authority.[17]

The meaning implicit in Jiang's reemphasis of the "primary stage of socialism" is multifold.[18] First, it is understandable that Jiang wants "Deng's flag" to fly, since as Deng's heir, his political legitimacy is based on Deng's legacy. If Jiang tolerated the leftists' attack on Deng's reform line, his own position would certainly be destabilized. This is also true of the entire third generation of collective leadership which Deng put together. Facing challenges from the leftists, Jiang and the other leaders had no choice but to strike back.

Second, even though Deng's reform line has resulted in enormous "negative" socioeconomic consequences, China's rapid economic growth can also be attributed to Deng's reform. With no revolutionary experience, the new leadership has been increasingly dependent on economic development for their political legitimacy. If economic reform has made China chaotic, then the new leadership has to show that this is only a transitional phenomenon. It is in this context that Jiang has reiterated the theory of the "primary stage of socialism"; in doing so, he has attempted to show that economic development is still the party's highest priority, and that China's main task is growth regardless whether it is socialistic or capitalistic. In addition, the theory provides an explanation to China's chaotic phenomena, and holds out the view that the party-state, with the discovery of new institutions and methods, will control these phenomena in the future.

Third, by calling for a third liberation of thought, Jiang has begun to pursue his own ideological reconstruction. While it has been necessary to defend Deng as his heir, Jiang also needs to further expand and consolidate his own power. This situation is similar to Deng's, as he did not totally abandon Mao's legacies, but took the political initiative and established his own theory of Chinese development. Indeed, as one scholar observed, after the Fourteenth Congress, Jiang began making efforts to formulate his own way of governing

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[16]Jiang Zemin's talk, see *People's Daily*, May 30, 1997.

[17]Ren Huiwen, "The CCP Defends Jiang's Authority as the Core from the Theoretical Point of View," *Xin bao*, August 22, 1997.

[18]On the economic side, see John Wong, "Good Political Arithmetic: China's Economy on the Eve of the Fifteenth Party Congress," *EAI Background Brief*, no. 1 (East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, September 2, 1997).

the country, different from Deng's. While Deng consistently insisted on decentralization, Jiang has placed much emphasis on recentralization.[19] In Jiang's view, there is no contradiction between "letting Deng's flag fly" and "developing a non-Deng theory": to continue supporting Deng's theory entails developing and even going beyond it in accordance with changing internal and external circumstances.

In the early 1990s, when the Soviet Union and East European communism collapsed, Deng initiated the "second liberation of thought" by arguing that only by developing the country's economy and delivering economic benefits to its people could the CCP survive the worsening international environment. This created a favorable condition for political stability, but as these former communist states are now gradually recovering, the CCP is once again faced with both domestic and foreign challenges. Without doubt, a third liberation of thought can be regarded as a new call for the party to pay attention to new conditions. For the people, it means that the regime is likely to carry out new economic and political reforms.

Strengthening the Jiang Fortress: Personnel Reshuffling

Mao Zedong once contended that after the political line is established, cadres become determinant. This is the Chinese way of policy implementation; as a country that lacks modern, rational institutions, a core leadership is necessary for making decisions. In order to have policies implemented, the central leadership must choose those who are willing and have strong motivation to follow mandates from above.

During the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, Mao eliminated almost all his foes and built a "fortress" in order to implement his radical policies. Similarly, after Deng came to power, his first priority was to reform the system of party and state leadership in order to have his reform programs implemented.[20] As a result, radicals were ousted from party and state organizations and were replaced by younger and better-educated ones. In terms of cadre system reform, the Deng era was called an age of "technoc-

[19]Wu, *Zhulu shiwuda*, 20-23.

[20]This was reflected in his most famous talk about political reform. See Deng Xiaoping, "On the Reform of the System of Party and State Leadership" (August 18, 1980), in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), 302-25.

racy."[21] Indeed, one of Deng's legacies was to transform the CCP from a revolutionary party into an administrative one. Local officials' economic performance became the most important standard for the central leadership to judge their political achievements. At the top level, only those who showed strong support for Deng's reform policies could have access to power. More importantly, Deng effectively used the party's cadre system to promote the country's economic modernization.[22]

This pattern has also been true for Jiang, who began to build his personnel fortress in 1992. Institutionally, Jiang took over power in 1992 when he was selected as the CCP's leader at the Fourteenth Congress. Through the Fourteenth Congress and the First Plenum of the Fourteenth Central Committee, he established a Jiang-centered leadership and consolidated relations with the military. At the Second Plenum in 1993, Jiang continued to emphasize the organizational buildup of his power base, with the plenum endorsing the proposal of reforming the party and government organs in order to improve the effectiveness of the party-state's government. The focus of the Fourth Plenum in 1994 remained on strengthening party organizations, with major personnel changes being made in that session. Consequently, a Jiang-centered faction was firmly established–the Shanghai faction.[23]

Nevertheless, Jiang has been very cautious in dealing with different political factions at the top. Since the early 1990s, he has been successful in winning support from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and gaining cooperation from Li Peng, who has been in the top leadership echelon longer than Jiang. However, whenever Jiang has felt that his leadership has been challenged, he has reacted with determination. In 1995, for example, he greatly reduced the influence of the Beijing faction by removing Beijing mayor Chen Xitong, who committed serious economic crimes, from the top leadership.

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[21]See Lee Hong Yung, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Cheng Li and Lynn White III, "The Thirteenth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: From Mobilizers to Managers," *Asian Survey* 28, no. 4 (April 1988): 371-99; Cheng Li and Lynn White III, "Elite Transformation and Modern Change in Mainland China and Taiwan: Empirical Data and the Theory of Technocracy," *The China Quarterly*, no. 121 (March 1990): 1-39; Zang Xiaowei, "The Fourteenth Central Committee of the CCP: Technocracy or Political Technocracy," *Asian Survey* 33, no. 8 (August 1993): 787-803.

[22]This has been called the "political logic of economic reform." See Susan L. Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[23]IEAPE Special Correspondent, "The Decision of the Fourth Plenum: Coping with the Decline of the Communist Party of China," *IEAPE Commentaries*, no. 10 (December 21, 1994); and "The Fourth Party Plenum: Emergence of a New Shanghai Cliqué in the Top Leadership," ibid., no. 9 (October 18, 1994).

The recent Fifteenth Congress certainly reinforced the Jiang fortress through a major personnel reshuffling, as shown in tables 1 and 2. It is also obvious that Jiang has made efforts to consolidate the Shanghai faction by bringing Zeng Qinghong into the Politburo (as an alternate member). It is important to note, however, that the "Jiang fortress" was consolidated at the congress not only because the Shanghai faction is expanded, but also because many of Jiang's supporters come from other areas. With experience at the center of power, Jiang no longer needs to recruit his people exclusively from Shanghai, as shown in table 2.

Table 1
Pre-Fifteenth Party Congress Politburo

Name	Year of Birth	Educational Background	Power Base
Standing Committee Members: Average age 68.7 years			
Jiang Zemin	1926	engineering	central and local
Li Peng	1928	engineering	central
Qiao Shi	1924	social sciences	central
Zhu Rongji	1928	engineering	central and local
Li Ruihuan	1934	polytechnic	local
Liu Huaqing	1916	naval school	military
Hu Jintao	1942	engineering	local and central
Members:			
Ding Guangen	1929	engineering	central
Tian Jiyun	1929	polytechnic	local and central
Li Lanqing	1932	business	local and central
Li Tieying	1936	physics	local and central
Yang Baibing	1920	social sciences	military
Wu Bangguo	1941	engineering	local
Zou Jiahua	1926	industrial management	central
Jiang Chunyun	1930	arts & social sciences	local
Qian Qichen	1928	junior college	central
Wei Jianxing	1931	engineering	local and central
Huang Ju	1938	engineering	local
Xie Fei	1932	(unclear)	local
Alternate Members:			
Wen Jiabao	1942	geology	local and central
Wang Hanbin	1925	humanities	local and central
Average Age: 65.6 years			

Table 2
The New Politburo at the Fifteenth Party Congress

Name	Year of Birth	Educational Background	Power Base
Standing Committee Members: Average age 65.4 years			
Jiang Zemin	1926	engineering	central and local
Li Peng	1928	engineering	central
Zhu Rongji	1928	engineering	central and local
Hu Jintao	1942	engineering	local and central
Li Ruihuan	1934	polytechnic	local
Wei Jianxing*	1931	engineering	local and central
Li Lanqing*	1932	business	local and central
Members:			
Ding Guangen	1929	engineering	central
Tian Jiyun	1929	polytechnic	local and central
Li Changchun*	1944	engineering	local and central
Li Tieying	1936	physics	local and central
Wu Bangguo	1941	engineering	local
Wu Guanzheng*	1938	engineering	local
Chi Haotian*	1929	military school	military
Zhang Wannian*	1928	military school	military
Luo Gan*	1935	engineering	local and central
Jiang Chunyun	1930	arts & social sciences	local
Jia Qinglin*	1940	engineering	local
Qian Qichen	1928	junior college	central
Huang Ju	1938	engineering	local
Wen Jiabao*	1942	geology	local and central
Xie Fei	1932	(unclear)	local
Alternate Members:			
Zeng Qinghong*	1939	engineering	local
Wu Yi*	1938	engineering	central
Average Age: 61.9 years			

*Newly-recruited member.

Of special political significance is the retirement of Qiao Shi and General Liu Huaqing. With the former's withdrawal from all his posts in the CCP, Jiang is now without any possible challenger. More importantly, regardless of whether Qiao retired voluntarily or was forced to retire, his retirement will likely resolve the "exit" problem endemic in the CCP, in which aged leaders are reluctant to give up their positions of power, and thus "stand behind" young leaders as they "fight" in the front line. Now with Qiao's departure,

Jiang is setting up a procedure for old leaders to "exit" gracefully from their positions of power when they become aged.

With Liu Huaqing's departure from the Politburo Standing Committee, it seems that Jiang has secured his control over the military. But the significance of Liu's departure goes beyond that. In the pre-reform period, Mao Zedong controlled the military for more than twenty-seven years (1949-76), with the support of Zhu De, Lin Biao, Ye Jianying, and other generals. Deng Xiaoping was also capable of exerting control over the military owing to his strong military background. When Zhao Ziying was general secretary of the party, for instance, there was no military representative in the Politburo Standing Committee, but Deng controlled the military behind the scenes. Now, among the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee, no one has a military background. This implies that with the passing of the old, strong military men, the party and not individual leaders will "hold the gun." With the weakened military presence at the top leadership, the Chinese government's transition to a modern civil-military relationship is likely to occur in the near future.

The personnel reshuffling at the congress also demonstrates that the top leadership is determined to further promote economic reform. China's economic reform is approaching its most difficult phase, SOE reform, which not only concerns economics but also politics. Without top leaders' commitment, it is doubtful whether the party will succeed in SOE reform. Fortunately, a consensus on economic reform seems to have been reached at the top due to the success stories of economic management in the provinces and central bureaucracies. With Zhu Rongji and Li Lanqing in charge of economic matters, the party leadership has obviously expressed its concerns for the "economic priority." Zhu has been known as China's economic czar, and since 1993 has been successful in managing China's economic transition. Prior to the Fifteenth Congress, Zhu promised to introduce dramatic changes to China's SOEs. Consistent with Zhu's initiatives, Jiang has also emphasized that the party will use all possible means to reform SOEs. This indicates that even if disagreement is likely among the top leaders, the consensus on economic reform remains.

However, the most important issue facing Jiang Zemin and his leadership at the Fifteenth Congress was how to establish a fourth and even a fifth generation of leadership. At previous party congresses, old guard such as Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, Ye Jianying, and Li Xiannian were powerful enough to choose their own successors. However, even these powerful figures were not able to ensure that power succession could be smooth, as

Table 3
Age Structure of the CCP's Fifteenth Central Committee

(193 Members and 151 Alternate Members)

Age	No.	Percentage
61 and above	68	19.8
56-60	118	34.3
51-55	107	31.1
50 and below	51	14.8

Source: *People's Daily*, September 19, 1997.

shown in the cases of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. Major leaders of the third generation have learned from China's past experiences that power succession, especially in an age of great transformation, is vital both for the party and the country. Without the old guard, the Politburo Standing Committee as a whole thus had to play the role of guardians to choose the next generation of leadership.

As table 2 shows, the Politburo Standing Committee is still faced with the problem of aging. By the next party congress (2002), all the committee members will be over seventy except for Hu Jintao. Nevertheless, younger figures have been recruited into the Politburo, the Secretariat, and the Central Committee. Among 193 members of the Central Committee, about 52 percent were newly recruited, with most being younger and better-educated. Table 3 shows the age structure of the Central Committee. With the recruitment of new figures into these organizations, the next generation of leadership is expected to be ready by the next party congress in 2002.

Especially important are personnel changes at the provincial level. Deng Xiaoping was successful in promoting China's rapid economic growth mainly because he had a group of reform-minded local party cadres and government officials. With Zhao Ziyang and Wan Li summoned to Beijing and with reformist local leaders coming into key positions, China's economic reform gained political dynamism. Thanks to this and the introduction of "new blood" into the central leadership from the provinces, the third generation has been able to present an energetic image. Jiang Zemin, Zhu Rongji, Hu Jintao, and many others have benefited from their local experiences, as well as figures such as Wu Bangguo, Li Ruihuan, and Jiang Chunyun, among others. Now that the third generation must choose successors, it must recruit young figures who have been successful in managing local businesses for key provincial positions.

Table 4
Personnel Reshuffling at the Provincial Level

	Party Secretary	Mayor/Governor/Chairman
Beijing	*Jia Qinglin	Jia Qinglin
Tianjin	*Zhang Lichang	Zhang Lichang
Hebei	Cheng Weigao	Ye Liansong
Inner Mongolian	Liu Mingzu	Wuliji
Liaoning	*Wen Shizhen	Wen Shizhen
Helongjiang	Xu Youfang	Tian Fengshan
Jilin	*Zhang Dejiang	Wang Yunkun
Shanghai	Huang Ju	Xu Kuangdi
Jiangsu	Chen Huanyou	Zheng Silin
Zhejiang	Li Zemin	Chai Songyue (acting)
Anhui	Lu Rongjing	Hui Liangyu
Fujian	Chen Mingyi	He Guoqiang
Jiangxi	*Shu Huiguo	Shu Shengyou
Shandong	*Wu Guanzheng	Li Chunting
Shanxi	Hu Fuguo	Sun Wencheng
Henan	Li Changchun	Ma Zhongchen
Hubei	Jia Zhijie	Jiang Zhuping
Hunan	Wang Maolin	Yang Zhengwu
Guangdong	Xie Fei	Lu Ruihua
Guangxi	*Cao Bochun	Cheng Kejie
Hainan	Ruan Chongwu	Ruan Chongwu
Sichuan	Xie Shijie	Song Baorui
Yunnan	*Ling Hu'an	He Zhiqiang
Guizhou	Liu Fangren	Wu Yixia
Shaanxi	*Li Jianguo	Cheng Andong
Gansu	Yan Haiwang	Sun Ying (acting)
Qinghai	*Tian Chengping	Bai Enpei (acting)
Ningxia	*Mao Rubai	Bai Lizhen
Xinjiang	Wang Lequan	Abulahat Abdurixit
Tibet	Chen Kuiyuan	Gyaincain Norbu
Chongqing	Zhang Delin	Pu Haiqing

*Newly-appointed party secretaries.

Prior to the Fifteenth Congress, a major personnel reshuffling took place at the provincial level. Within less than one year, eleven provinces had new party secretaries (see table 4). A detailed analysis of provincial personnel reshuffling is not possible here, but some characteristics of the reshuffling merit notice. According to the China News Agency, the reshuffling took place in order to meet the party's requirements for new leadership, including provincial

leaders' educational levels, age, and their experience in different locations.[24] Among the eleven newly-appointed provincial party secretaries, six were born in the 1940s, including Jia Qinglin (Beijing), Wen Shizhen (Liaoning), Cao Bochun (Guangxi), Li Jianguo (Shaanxi), Ling Hu'an (Yunnan), and Tian Chengping (Qinghai). Most new appointees had received a high education with science and engineering backgrounds. It is also worth noting that this provincial personnel reshuffling was also characterized by what the CCP called "personnel exchange," i.e., local leaders being transferred to different places. Obviously, "personnel exchange" is a legacy of the traditional "avoidance system" which Chinese emperors used to restrain localism. It has also become a legacy of the CCP, as Mao and later Deng used it to control party cadres and government officials' behavior. What Susan Shirk calls "playing to the provinces" means that the central leadership uses its personnel system to control the rise of localism on the one hand, and provide local officials with greater political incentives to promote local economic growth on the other.[25] Jiang and the other leaders have certainly played with this system to achieve what Deng did before, but the system can also be used to "dig out" potential candidates for the next generation of leadership. Predictably, many future top CCP leaders will be chosen from these local figures.

Political Reform Implicit in Political Practice

As China's top leaders have changed their perceptions regarding the importance of "economic priority," China's economy has grown dramatically. Progress has been made in building a consensus about China's economic reform, and even though reformist leaders' economic policies have often come under attack by leftists, major new "economic theories" have been offered at party congresses since the beginning of the Deng era.

However, the situation is rather different on the political side. First, compared to economic reforms, political reforms have been more about power redistribution among major leaders and different party-state organizations. While economic reforms have often resulted in a win-win situation, political reforms can be described as a zero-sum game, as resistance to any kind of political reform can be strong from those who stand much to lose. Second and

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[24]*Hong Kong Economic Daily*, September 2, 1997, A29.

[25]Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China*, 55-91.

more importantly, political reform is about power distribution between the party-state and society. In other words, political reform necessarily means the democratization of the country to some extent, even though the latter is not a real democracy. If democracy occurs, the whole political structure will change, and the resulting instability would damage the country's economy. Third, there is a structural difficulty in initiating political reform. In a Leninist state, where everything is politicized by the party-state, political reform is impossible without initiatives from above. The party-state must therefore be powerful enough in order to initiate reform programs and have them implemented. This implies that political authoritarianism is a precondition for China's political reform; authoritarianism, however, is contradictory with political reform, not to mention democratization.

The above can be applied to what has occurred in China since the Deng era began. In the early 1980s, Deng argued that political reforms were necessary in order to promote economic reform and protect the "fruits" resulting from economic reform. Changes were introduced to China's political system: the lifelong office-holding system was eliminated and a young generation of leaders was recruited into the top leadership. In addition, Deng encouraged political discussions among social and political groups in order to establish a new theoretical basis for a new era, and also allowed people to criticize the party and the state to some extent. However, when criticism of the system per se came into being, Deng and the other old-generation leaders became intolerant. In response, Deng sought to improve the party-state's performance by institutional reforms. Between the Twelfth (1982) and Thirteenth Congress (1987), various political campaigns against "spiritual pollution" and "bourgeois liberalization" were initiated. In 1986, General Secretary Hu Yaobang was forced to resign due to his ambiguous attitudes toward "bourgeois liberalization."

During the Thirteenth Congress, General Secretary Zhao Ziyang proposed a "radical" program for China's political reform. With Deng's support, Zhao argued that a socialist democracy had to be developed in order to facilitate economic reform. According to Zhao, in order to promote democracy, the party-state had to allow social forces to participate in politics, and his program included grass-roots democracy and social supervision over government. Nevertheless, Zhao's program remained largely rhetorical, and with the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations, his political reform came to an end.[26]

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[26]On Zhao Ziyang's political reform program at the Thirteenth Party Congress, see Yan Huai,

Because of China's own experiences, and also because of chaos in the former Soviet Union as a result of radical political reform, the Fourteenth Congress (1992) did not discuss political reform. With Deng's South China tour, the whole country's attention had overwhelmingly turned to economic activities or *xiahai* (literally, going to the sea of business). With enormous economic opportunities opening up to the people, the pressure for political reform decreased. Social and political forces were more geared to political stability and economic profits rather than political reform and democracy. For example, the party mentioned political reform in the communiqué of its Fourteenth Congress, but the central focus was anti-corruption, not wider political participation.

However, this does not mean in any way that political reform has not been significant for China. With more than eight years in power, Jiang understands why political reform is imperative for himself and the party. Various crucial problems need to be resolved, such as corruption among government officials, power succession or the selection of new leaders, political participation, etc. Liu Ji, vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and an advisor to Jiang, argues that without political reform, China will not be able to resolve these major issues, thus endangering the party.[27]

First, corruption has become increasingly serious. Since Chen Xitong's corruption case was exposed in early 1995, more and more corruption cases among government officials and party cadres, especially at the middle and local levels, have been publicized. Indeed, many top leaders were rather surprised when they discovered that government positions at local levels could be bought and sold. If this trend cannot be stopped, the party as an organization will break down.[28]

Furthermore, without a national election system and a free press, it is hard for people to convey their demands and complaints to the leadership. Rapid economic development has also resulted in enormous undesirable consequences such as corruption, massive unemployment, money worship,

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"Zhao Ziyang's Bold Political Reform Attempts at the 13th Party Congress," *IEAPE Background Brief*, no. 67 (July 8, 1994).

[27]"Liu Ji Acknowledges That China's Political Reform Lags Behind," *Xin bao*, September 2, 1997.

[28]On corruption in the CCP, see Yan Huai, "Corruption in China" (Parts I and II), *IEAPE Background Brief*, nos. 73 and 74 (October 14, 1994); and IEAPE Correspondent, "Increasing Seriousness of Corruption in China," ibid., no. 84 (March 8, 1995). On the Chen Xitong case, see IEAPE Correspondent, "Resignation of Beijing Party Chief Chen Xitong: A Politically Motivated But Limited Move Against Corruption," *IEAPE Commentaries*, no. 15 (June 12, 1995).

officials' coercive behavior, worsening public security, ethnic nationalism, workers' strikes, etc. If these issues cannot be handled properly and promptly, political trouble will follow. Major leaders thus need to be sensitive to these issues in their decisionmaking, and even though public opinions are not used as a basis, leaders must consider public reaction to their policies. As political stability is a priority, it is understandable that the top leaders cannot afford to democratize China. Therefore, they must provide people with other means of political participation and at least channels for the public to express their opinions, as well as establish mechanisms to constrain government officials' coercive behavior.

Finally, China still lacks a mechanism for power succession. Old revolutionaries such as Deng did not find much difficulty in choosing or dethroning their own heirs. However, as the Jiang-centered leadership lacks the old guard, it will encounter enormous obstacles in power succession. Apparently, Jiang does not have much choice in selecting his own heir.[29] Institutionalizing the selection process is thus important for the party to avoid a power succession crisis.

In response to the above needs, calls for political reform have arisen among some social and political groups.[30] As a result, Jiang and the other major leaders began to discuss political reform before the Fifteenth Congress. In contrast to Zhao's time, Jiang and the other leaders no longer talk about political reform ideologically, focusing instead on "implicit political reform," which means that changes need to be introduced into China's political practice rather than to its political discourse. This was largely reflected in Jiang's political agenda at this congress. From the rhetorical point of view, he said nothing new about political reform, but this does not mean that his attempts in this regard were not important, as many journalists have interpreted.[31] As a matter of fact, what Jiang did was to introduce more institutional elements into China's political system. By doing so, he expects to lay down a foundation for further political reform while maintaining political stability. Four aspects of this institutionalization merit discussion.

First, at the congress the party leadership proposed a draft of the method

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[29]On Jiang's weakness, see Richard Baum, "The Jockeying for Power," *Asian Wall Street Journal*, September 11, 1997.

[30]Kathy Chen, "Wider Range of Voices Speaks Up in China: Louder Reform Calls Resonate Ahead of Communist Party Congress," ibid., September 11, 1997.

[31]For example, according to Jasper Becker, "Despite the growing calls for political reform, President Jiang Zemin outlined only the smallest steps to change the Leninist system." *South China Morning Post*, September 13, 1997.

for electing members to the CCP Central Committee. Indeed, differential elections were introduced into party congresses after Deng Xiaoping came to power.[32] With the passing of the old-generation leaders, elections have become increasingly important for China's elite recruitment system and power succession. Unlike the old guard, the new leaders, who lack revolutionary experience, do not have a sound base for their political legitimacy. Elections will thus become an increasingly important method for selecting party elites. A working election system will reinforce the party leadership's legitimacy among party members, and also means that the party's top leaders could attempt to develop a mechanism for democracy within the party.

Second, anti-corruption is another major concern in Jiang's political reform program. Jiang's emphasis has been on using legal methods to cope with the issues, and he has stressed the importance of the people's supervision of government officials and party cadres' behavior. Nevertheless, his central concern is how an effective legal system can be established to constrain corruption. As a result, as has long been expected, the party congress decided to transfer Chen Xitong's case to the courts after Chen was punished by party disciplines.

Third, Jiang has no intention of expanding Chinese democracy in terms of the relations between the state and society. Nevertheless, he has called for consolidating grass-roots democracy. China's rural election system was established in 1987, and has worked very impressively considering that the CCP has never had such a democratic experiment before. Indeed, the implementation of grass-roots democracy has had a positive impact on the CCP, at least providing a channel for local residents to express their complaints about the party-state and thus ease the tensions between the state and society. As a result, the political legitimacy of the CCP has increased, and the top leaders have found that the system can be used to elicit "good people" and identify "bad ones." Without doubt, Jiang and his leadership needs such a system to show that the CCP is becoming more democracy-friendly.

Fourth and most importantly, Jiang Zemin proposed for the first time that the party would give its highest priority to the rule of law. The rule of law means that laws must be applicable to every individual in a given society; the rulers must follow the laws as the ruled do; and rulers' behavior should be predictable.[33] With increasing numbers of crimes committed by party cadres and

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[32]For a discussion of the impact of differential elections on power succession, see Wu, *Zhulu shiwuda*, 41-42.

[33]F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 80. For a

government officials, the leadership finds it imperative to use law to constrain and regulate their behavior. Also, with rising societal demands for political reform, the rule of law seems necessary to mediate and defuse political pressure. While democratization can lead to chaos, the rule of law can guarantee sociopolitical stability while also promoting democracy.

A Party in Transition

Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto argues that power can be quantitatively measured by what one has done.[34] According to Max Weber, when traditional power resources such as ideology and personality are gone, new leaders have to rationalize their power by institution-building.[35] The latter is what Jiang Zemin has done at the Fifteenth Party Congress.

Jiang has had a good sense of political calculation for himself and the CCP; having realized that he cannot be a paramount leader like Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, he has turned to rely on the party. As long as he remains the first among equals within the party leadership, and as long as the party dominates the state and society, his position of supreme power is secured. Certainly, the party is important for Jiang himself and the country's development. While Deng transformed the party from a revolutionary one into an administrative one, Jiang has continued to rebuild it by introducing various institutional elements, expecting that the party will adjust itself to changing socioeconomic situations while promoting the country's further development. From the perspective of party transformation, Jiang has been quite successful.

First, Jiang has made the party's ideology more flexible by reinterpreting the "primary stage of socialism" theory. What exactly the theory means is still unclear, but what is clear is that the theory is compatible with almost everything. As a popular Chinese adage indicates, "The theory of the primary stage is like a basket; you can put in whatever you want." By reinterpreting the theory, Jiang has shown that the party's priority is still developing the country's economy. On the other hand, Jiang has also contended that the various

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discussion of the rule of law in the Chinese context, see Zheng Yongnian, "From Rule by Law to Rule of Law? A Realistic View of China's Legal Development" (Manuscript, East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, 1997).

[34]For an introduction of Pareto's power theory, see Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, vol. 2 (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), chap. 2.

[35]See Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organizations*, ed. Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1964), 324-37.

"negative" consequences resulting from rapid economic development are temporary and transitional. While leftists have attributed these undesirable consequences to reform, Jiang argues that these are the necessary costs of reform. More importantly, a flexible ideology benefits the party by making the party flexible and sensitive to changing socioeconomic conditions. As long as the party can adjust itself to new developments, it will stand as the leading force of Chinese society.

Second, ideology per se does not matter; it requires believers who are willing to understand and behave in accordance with its gist. The leadership's commitment to economic priority, however, does matter. Since good economic performance has become the base of the party's political legitimacy, Jiang needs to recruit dedicated leaders into the party leadership. Even though the latter has been largely unchanged, new figures have been recruited into other important party positions. As discussed above, new recruits consolidate Jiang's position, but also strengthen the party. With a new generation of leaders coming to the Chinese political hierarchy at different levels, the party is prepared to lead the country into the twenty-first century.

Finally, when the party's priority is stability and development, not much can be done about political reform. After being in power for many years and having witnessed political chaos in Russia, Jiang knows how important the transformation of the party is. Without a strong party-state leading political reform, chaos will follow. Jiang thus has a sound rationale in giving priority to the institutional building of the party-state and the rule of law rather than broader political participation or democracy. With the institutionalization of the party-state at the top and the grass-roots democracy taking place below, China's political transformation could be more stable and easier in the next century.

Nevertheless, Jiang Zemin is not without challenges in implementing his new agenda. Most measures proposed by Jiang such as reforming SOEs and curbing corruption are merely "fire-fighting" ones, aiming to cope with the most pressing problems. Without the presence of the old guard, Jiang will probably be powerful enough to initiate his own political agendas in an attempt to create a new era associated with his name. However, whether Jiang will be capable of having his agenda realized still requires the test of time.