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Tamás Kisvári:[1] What we can expect at the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party of China

Executive summary

- The 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party kicked off on 16th October 2022. Despite the high uncertainties of forecasts, we can still draw conclusions about the new leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Central Military Commission (CMC) by analyzing previous party congresses concerning the personnel changes.
- One can observe that the main rule that applies is the 'retirement age' rule (i.e., leaders turning 68 years old must resign from their positions) – even though there are other rules influencing decisions.
- The changes during 20th Party Congress will be decisive in answering the question of whether the CPC would turn to the path of individual leadership or would continue with the commission-based decision-making system established by Deng Xioaping in the 1970s. Our current expectation is that Xi Jinping would be re-elected for the historic third time as premier.
- There were three strong distinct factions within the CPC, nominating capable leaders to the party/state leadership: the 'Youth League' historically represented by Hu Jintao, the 'Shanghai circle' represented by Jiang Zemin, and the strongest current faction led by Xi Jinping, which is a new clique.
- While Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang will stay in the number one and number two position of the Party until 2027, two successors will be elected to the top echelons: the future leaders of China could be Hu Chunhua and Ding Xuexiang.
- In the Central Military Commission, the two vice-chairmen will retire in the 20th Party Congress due to their age, and the number of vice-chairmen might increase to three.

China is a country that is difficult to understand because of the interconnectedness of the Communist Party and the state. The rules are very flexible, especially in party affairs, so it is not easy to make predictions. In addition, the Party Congress in 2017 counteracted all well-established anticipations concerning generation change due to the expulsion of Sun Zhengcai as a consequence of his corruption case. When analysing some of the last Party Congresses concerning the personnel changes, one can observe that the main rule that applies is the 'retirement age' rule. There are some other rules that influence the decision-making process, however, there are also exceptions to these rules.

The personnel changes during 20th Party Congress will be decisive in answering the question of whether the Communist Party of China would turn to the path of individual leadership or would continue with the commission-based decision-making system established by Deng Xioaping in the 1970s. My expectation is the latter one, namely that two successors will be elected to the top echelons and Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang will stay in the number one and number two position of the party until 2027. The future leaders of China will probably be Hu Chunhua and Ding Xuexiang. Hu Chunhua will become vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission during the 20th Party Congress (or later).

The two current vice-chairmen of the CMC will retire during the Congress. General Wei Fenghe has a good chance to be promoted to one of the vice-chairman positions. The other vice-chairman could be Li Zuocheng, the current chief of the Joint Staff Department or Miao Hua, the head of the Political Work Department. The heads of the Logistic Support Department and the Equipment Development Department could become members of the CMC again. Yi Xiaoguang, the former commander of the Central Theatre Command could join the CMC as the representative of the PLA Air Force in a position of one of the departments.

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Drawing lessons from earlier party congresses is not easy

The current analysis will give an assessment and forecast to the possible future leadership of the People's Republic of China and the future composition of the Central Military Commission (CMC) on the basis of the personnel changes[2] of the last five congresses of the Communist Party of China, the 15th Party Congress in 1997, the 16th Party Congress in 2002, the 17th Party Congress in 2007, the 18th Party Congress in 2012, and the 19th Party Congress in 2017. Before going into details regarding expectations for the 20th Party Congress, it is desirable to highlight the difficulties of estimating the outcome of the next congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) through previous congresses' examples.

In 2017, few months before the congress, most experts on China were confident that the two new leaders of the People's Republic of China would be Sun Zhengcai and Hu Chunhua, two members of the 25-member Political Bureau (PB) of the Central Committee of the 18th Party Congress. Both were born in the 1960s, so they were about 10 years younger than the other members of the PB. Both of them had been provincial party leaders before, Sun Zhengcai (孙政才, born in September 1963) was party secretary in Jilin Province and later in Chongqing, while Hu Chunhua (胡春华, born in April 1963) was party secretary in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and later in Guangdong Province, so both of them seemed to be ideal candidates for the number one and number two positions of the future party leadership.[3] Hu Chunhua was also the president of the Communist Youth League in his carrier, and he had been a member of the Central Committee (CC) since 2007, and a member of the PB since 2012. His current position is Vice Premier of the State Council.

In a Weibo communique of the Xinhua News Agency on 14th October 2017, just days before the planned party congress, the news became public that Sun Zhengcai had been expelled from the party for serious discipline violations, the term which is usually used for corruption cases in the PRC. The announcement also mentioned two military persons who were members of the CC, Wang Jianping (王建平, born in December 1953), the deputy chief of the Joint Staff Department, the former commander of the People's Armed Police, and Tian Xiusi (田修思, born in February 1950) who was the political commissar of the People's Liberation Army Air Force till 2015. According to the Xinhua announcement, altogether 12 Central Committee members, alternate members or members of the Central Discipline Commission of the Party Congress were expelled from the party.[4]

Two military leaders, two members of the Central Military Commission of the Central Committee of the 18th Party Congress, General Fang Fenghui (房峰辉, born in April 1951), the chief of the Joint Staff Department and General Zhang Yang (张阳, born in August 1951), the head of the Political Work Department (who were expected to become even vice-chairmen of the CMC) were not elected as delegates to the 19th Party Congress because they were placed under an anti-corruption investigation.[5] On 28th November 2017 it was reported that General Zhang Yang had committed suicide[6] and on 20th February 2019 it was published that General Fang Fenghui received a life sentence for corruption.[7] It is important to mention that in the reform process of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, the Joint Staff Department and the Political Work Department were downgraded in 2016 and the level of the deputy leaders of the two departments were reduced from the rank of general to lieutenant general.

It is also interesting to note that in 2017 most experts were guessing whether the commander of the newly established PLA Army and the commander of the new PLA Strategic Support Force would become members of the CMC. In the end all the branch chiefs of the PLA ceased to be members of the CMC after the 19th Party Congress.

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[2] Source for all biographical data in this study is the Baike Baidu database: https://baike.baidu.com/

[3] Tamás Kisvári: Analytical inquiry of the leadership changes within the Communist Party of China and the Chinese People's Liberation Army, *National Security Review*, 2018/2, p 47–69.

[4] 孙政才等12人被确认开除党籍, [online], 2017. 10. 14. Source: Xinhua Weibo account [2022. 04. 24.]

[5] Jun Mai: Chinese general reported to be facing corruption probe off military delegation to party congress, [online], 2017. 09. 06. Source: South China Morning Post [2022. 04. 24.]

[6] Minnie Chan: Top Chinese general in graft probe commits suicide in Beijing, [online], 2017. 11. 28. Source: South China Morning Post [2022. 04. 24.]

[7] Fang Fenghui: China's ex-top general jailed for life, [online], 2019. 02. 20. Source: bbc.com [2022. 04. 24.]

After reducing expectations, let us go back to the subject and have a look at what will definitely happen in October 2022 in the CPC. The most important political event for the Communist Party of China is the National Party Congress, which is held every five years.[8] During the congress, a new Central Committee is elected for a five-year period, until the next Congress.[9] Since the death of Mao Zedong, the CPC has held a Party Congress every five years and the last four congresses were organized in the second half of October or in the first half of November, thus the 20th Congress starts on 16th October 2022.

No.	Time	Place	Secretary General	Leadership (CC+ALT PB-PBSC Discip.)	Delegates	Party members
1st	July 23-31, 1921	Shanghai (Lake Nanhu)	Chen Duxiu	3-0 0-0 0	12	50
2nd	July 16-23, 1922	Shanghai	Chen Duxiu	5-0 0-0 0	12	195
3rd	June 12-20, 1923	Guangzhou	Chen Duxiu	5-0 0-0 0	30	432
4th	January 11-22, 1925	Shanghai	Chen Duxiu	5-0 0-0 0	20	994
5th	April 27-May 9, 1927	Wuhan	Chen Duxiu	29+10 7-0 0	80	50,967
6th	June 18-July 11, 1928	Moscow	Xiang Zhongfa	23+13 7-0 0	84+34	40.000
7th	April 23-June 11, 1945	Yan'an	Mao Zedong	44+33 13-5 0	544 + 208	1.21 million
8th	September 15-27, 1956	Beijing	Mao Zedong	97+73 17-6 0	1026 + 107	10.73 million
9th	April 1-24, 1969	Beijing	Mao Zedong	170+109 21-5 0	1512	22 million
10th	August 24-28, 1973	Beijing	Mao Zedong	195+124 21-9 0	1249	28 million
11th	August 12-18, 1977	Beijing	Hua Guofeng	201+132 23-5 0	1510	35 million
12th	September 1-11, 1982	Beijing	Hu Yaobang	210+138 25-6 132	1545	39.65 million

[8] 'The National Congress of the Party shall be held once every five years and convened by the Central Committee. In the event if the Central Committee deems it necessary, or more than one third of provincial-level Party organizations put forward a request, a National Congress may be convened early. Except in unusual circumstances, it may not be postponed. The number of delegates to the National Congress and the procedures governing their election shall be determined by the Central Committee.' Article 19 of the Constitution of the Communist Party of China. Source: Constitution of the Communist Party of China, [online], 2017.10. 24. Source: Xinhua [2022. 04. 24.]

[9] 'The Central Committee of the Party is elected for a term of five years. In the event if a National Congress is convened early or postponed, the term shall be shortened or extended accordingly. The length of Party membership of Central Committee members or alternate members must be a minimum of five years. The number of members and alternate members of a Central Committee shall be determined by the National Congress. Empty seats on the Central Committee shall be filled by alternate members in order of the number of votes they were elected by.' Article 22 of the Constitution of the Communist Party of China, ibid, p. 17.

13th	October 25-November 1, 1987	Beijing	Zhao Ziyang	175+11 17-5(6*) 69	1936	46 million
14th	October 12-18, 1992	Beijing	Jiang Zemin	189+130 20-7 108	2000	51 million
15th	September 12-18, 1997	Beijing	Jiang Zemin	193+151 22-7 115	2074	58 million
16th	November 8-14, 2002	Beijing	Hu Jintao	198+158 24-9 121	2120	66 million
17th	October 15-21, 2007	Beijing	Hu Jintao	208+167 25-9	2217	73 million
18th	November 8-14, 2012	Beijing	Xi Jinping	20?-10? 25-7 1??	2270	82.6 million
19th	October 18-24, 2017	Beijing	Xi Jinping	204-172 25-7 133	2287	

(CC – Central Committee members and alternate members, PB – Politburo, PBSC – Politburo Standing Committee, Discipl.: Central Commission for Discipline Inspection)
*It was extended to six members in June 1989 and there was one alternate member between 1987 and 1992.

Figure 1: An overview of CPC Party Congresses. Sources: China Daily[10]

The role of the CPC Party Congress

Article 20 of the CPC constitution defines the role and tasks of the congress:

1) to hear and examine the reports of the Central Committee;
2) to examine the reports of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection;
3) to discuss and make decisions on major issues concerning the Party;
4) to revise the Constitution of the Party;
5) to elect the Central Committee; and
6) to elect the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection.[11]

In the following I will concentrate on the last points, namely the election of the new leadership of the Party. The National Congress elects the Central Committee and the Central Commission for Discipline Inspections, the Central Committee will then elect its Political Bureau (PB), the Standing Committee of the PB and the Secretary General of the Central Committee and it will elect the Central Military Commission of the CPC, too.

In the CPC, the Secretary General is the highest authority, the 'face of the party'. The Central Committee of the 19th Party Congress elected Xi Jinping as the Secretary General of the CPC and elected him as the Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC). There was a decision at the 19th Party Congress that Xi Jinping remains as the President of People's Republic of China, but the 'election' took place at the meeting of the National People's Congress in March 2018.[12]

It is worth noting that the three top positions – the secretary general of CPC, president of PRC, the chairman of the CMC – were always filled by the same people in the recent history of the CPC. Xi Jinping is the head of the 5th generation leadership of the CPC.

[10] CPC in Numbers, [online], 2017.10. 18. Source: China Daily [2022. 04. 24.] and Party Congresses, [online], Source: China Daily [2022. 04. 24.]
[11] Article 20, Constitution of the Communist Party of China, ibid, p 17.
[12] Tamás Kisvári: ibid, 56.

Gen			born	CPC SC	CMC	President
1st	Mao Zedong	毛泽东	Dec 1893	1943 -1976	1954-1976	1949-1959
2nd	Deng Xiaoping	邓小平	Aug 1904	-	1982-1989	-
3rd	Jiang Zemin	江泽民	Aug 1926	1989-2002	1989-2004	1993-2003
4th	Hu Jintao	胡锦涛	Dec 1942	2002-2012	2004-2012	2003-2013
5th	Xi Jinping	习近平	Jun 1953	2012-	2012-	2013-

Figure 2: The five generations of PRC leaders.

From the chart it is clear, that since 1993 the tenure of the President of the PRC has always been 10 years long. However, we can also see that the office period of the Secretary General or the Chairman of the CMC has varied in the past thirty years. (In this study I will not mention the times before Jiang Zemin because Deng Xiaoping was the leader of China without being the Secretary General of the party or the President of the PRC.)

Lessons learnt from electing previous generations of CPC leaders

It is worth to study the biography of the last three generations of leaders, with regards to how they became the leaders of the CPC.

In China there is a collective decision-making method in all organizations. For instance, each unit of the People's Liberation Army has a commander and a political commissar at the same level, from units bigger than company upwards, but there are similar structures in all organizations such as universities, companies, institutions, ministries. There is an appointed leader by the state or the owner, and there is a leader of the party group of the organization appointed by the higher-level party organization. The same applies to the leadership of the CPC, it is also collective.[13] The leaders of the top decision-making bodies after the reform and opening-up are listed below to highlight patterns.

Jiang Zemin (江泽民, born in August 1926) was leading China and the CPC from 1989 till 2002 together with Li Peng (李鹏, born in October 1928). The other members of the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) were changed in the party Congress in 1992 and 1997. Li Peng was the premier of the State Council

[13] 'Party committees at all levels shall function on the principle of combining collective leadership with individual responsibility based on the division of work. Decisions on all major issues shall be made through discussion by the Party committee concerned in accordance with the principles of collective leadership, democratic centralism, pre-meeting contemplation, and meeting-based decision making. Members of Party committees shall act in earnest to fulfil their respective obligations in accordance with the collective decisions made and the division of work.' Article 10, Constitution of the Communist Party of China, ibid, p. 14.

between 1988 and 1998, and then he was the chairman of the National People's Congress between 1998 and 2003. Between 1998 and 2003 the premier of the State Council was Zhu Rongji (朱镕基, born in October 1928).

From 2002 Hu Jintao (胡锦涛, born in December 1942) was the leader of the PRC and CCP. Beside him, there were three other persons in the top leadership of the party till 2012. Wu Bangguo (吴邦国, born in July 1941), the second person of the party, was the chairman of the National People's Congress between 2003 and 2013, Wen Jiabao (温家宝, born in September 1942), the third person of the party, who was the premier of the State Council between 2003 and 2013, and Jia Qinglin (贾庆林, born March 1940), who was the chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), and the fourth person of the top leadership of the party.

Since 2012, the CCP has been led by Xi Jinping (习近平, born June 1953) and Li Keqiang (李克强, born July 1955). Xi Jinping is the president of the PRC and Li Keqiang is the premier of the State Council. Both were elected to the Politburo Standing Committee in 2007 directly from the Central Committee and took over the number one and number two positions in the party in 2012.

Figure 3: The top leaders of the 3rd, 4th, 5th, and potential 6th generation of leaders of the PRC. (Edited by the author)

By looking at the changes in the party leadership, one can identify unwritten rules, and exceptions to these unwritten rules as well. Most members of the Politburo Standing Committee are coming from the Politburo, therefore not directly from the Central Committee (CC). The two exceptions were Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang in 2007, and there have been some other cases in the years before 2012, however there have been no exceptions since 2012. All members of the Politburo come from the CC, but normally they are members of the CC for more than one mandate before becoming members of the Politburo.

One of the most crucial factors in the leadership changes is the age of the leaders. In China there was an unwritten rule, valid until 2017, for the retirement of the top leaders of the country, which was the 'Seven-Up-Eight-Down' rule (七上八下). It meant every leader who was younger than 67 could start a new

mandate, but from 68 they could not anymore.[14] However, nowadays, when checking the Baidu search engine, one can find more and more articles arguing that some of the top leaders can start their last 5-year term at the age of 70 and can finish around the age of 75.[15]

When observing the changes undertaken at the last party congresses,[16] we can see that the age was decisive for the future of the members of the leadership. In the 15th Party Congress leadership between 1997 and 2002[17] the top echelon, the Politburo Standing Committee consisted of seven people, Jiang Zemin (江泽民, born in August 1926), Li Pen (李鹏, born in October 1928), Zhu Rongji (朱镕基, born in October 1928), Li Ruihuan (李瑞环, born September 1934), Hu Jintao (胡锦涛, born in December 1942), Wei Jiangxin (尉健行, born January 1931) and Li Lanqing (李岚清, born May 1932). In 2002 only Hu Jintao was younger than 67, born after 1935, so he was the only one who could continue in the Standing Committee of the Politburo. Additionally, his 5-year-term in the top leadership of 15th Party Congress gave him the experience required to lead the party between 2002 and 2012 and provide continuity in the leadership of China. It is also important to note that nearly all future members of the Politburo Standing Committee of the 16th Party Congress were members of the Politburo of the 15th Party Congress, so they were promoted only one position higher, from Politburo to Politburo Standing Committee. The only exception was Zeng Qinghong (曾庆红, born in July 1939) who was not full member before, only alternate member of the Politburo of the 14th and 15th Party Congress and became vice-president of the PRC between 2003 and 2008.

During the 16th Party Congress, between 2002 and 2007, the Politburo Standing Committee consisted of nine persons. Hu Jintao (胡锦涛, born in December 1942), Wu Bangguo (吴邦国, born in July 1941), Wen Jiabao (温家宝, born in September 1942), Jia Qinglin (贾庆林, born March 1940), Zeng Qinghong (曾庆红, born in July 1939), Huang Ju (黄菊, was born in September 1938), Wu Guanzheng (吴官正, born in August 1938), Li Changchun (李长春, was born in 1944) and Luo Gan (罗干, born in July 1935).

In 2007, during the 17th Party Congress, only those members of the top leadership could continue who were younger than 67 (those who were born after 1940). According to this principle, five members could continue from the nine, including Hu Jintao, Wu Bangguo, Wen Jiabao, Jia Qinglin and Li Changchun. Two of the four new members were Xi Jinping (习近平, born June 1953) and Li Keqiang (李克强, born July 1955) who came directly from the Central Committee and who were the designated persons of the next generation of leadership because they were one decade younger than the other members of the Politburo Standing Committee. The other two persons were He Guojiang (贺国强, born in October 1943) who was the chairman of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. The 9th member of the Politburo Standing Committee was Zhou Yongkang (周永康, born in December 1942), who supervised the whole law enforcement field as the head of the Commission of Policy and Law of the Central Committee. Zhou Yongkang is the highest-level official in China who has been sentenced for corruption in the last decades of the PRC. He received a life sentence. From the leadership of the 17th Party Congress, all members who were over 67 in 2012 (who were born before 1945) retired, leaving Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang to continue.

It is worth noting the fate of the members of the Politburo of the 16th and 17th Party Congresses because there is another important rule in the party: nobody leaves the leadership before reaching retirement age. This is because all decisions are made by commissions, so if anybody should leave before retirement age, it would mean that the party had made a bad personnel decision, so normally all leaders serve their time in position. The only exception is when corruption charges are raised, which has forced some leaders to leave and become subject to criminal procedure. Figure 4 shows that everybody who was older than 67 at

[14] 国家高级干部退休年龄规定,[online], 2021. 12. 21. Source: 年轮网 [2022. 04. 24.]

[15] 中国官员级别及退休年龄介绍; 可爱签名, [online], 2022. 07. 25. Source: gongxiaoai.com [2022. 10. 10.]

[16] 中国共产党中央委员会政治局委员,[online]. Source: Baidu Baike [2022. 04. 24.]

[17] 中国共产党中央委员会政治局常务委员会委员,[online]. Source: Baidu Baike [2022. 04. 24.]

the time of the 17th Party Congress left the leadership, while everybody else got promoted or continued to work at the same level.

Politburo Membership

➡ Continue in the same level
UP Promoted to Higher Echelon
— Expelled from the party

Standing Committee (in rank order)

	Selected in 2002			Selected in 2007			
	Name	*DOB*	*Position*	*Name*	*DOB*	*Position*	
From PBSC	Hu Jintao	1942 ➡	General Secretary	Hu Jintao	1942	General Secretary	From PBSC
From PB	Wu Bangguo	1941 ➡	NPC	Wu Bangguo	1941	NPC	From PBSC
From PB	Wen Jiabao	1942 ➡	Premier	Wen Jiabao	1942	Premier	From PBSC
From PB	Jia Qinglin	1940 ➡	Chair, CPPCC	Jia Qinglin	1940	CPPCC	From PBSC
From Alt PB	Zeng Qinghong	1939	Secretariat	Li Changchun	1944	Propaganda	From PBSC
From PB	Huang Ju	1938	Vice Premier	Xi Jinping ➡	1953	Secretariat	From CC
From PB	Wu Guanzheng	1938	CDIC	Li Keqiang ➡	1955	Executive Vice Premier?	From CC
From PB	Li Changchun	1944 ➡	Propaganda	He Guoqiang	1943	CDIC	From PB
From PB	Luo Gan	1935	Political-Legal Affairs	Zhou Yongkang	1942	Political-Legal Affairs	From PB

Other Full Members (Listed Alphabetically)

Name	*DOB*	*Position*	*Name*	*DOB*	*Position*
Cao Gangchuan	1935	Vice Chair, CMC	Bo Xilai	1949	Chongqing CCP Secretary
Chen Liangyu	1946	Shanghai CCP Secy.	Guo Boxiong	1942	Vice Chair, CMC
Guo Boxiong	1942	Vice Chair, CMC	Hui Liangyu	1944	Vice Premier
He Guoqiang	1943 UP	Organization	Li Yuanchao ➡	1950	Organization
Hui Liangyu	1944	Vice Premier	Liu Qi	1942	Beijing CCP Secretary
Liu Qi	1942	Beijing CCP Secretary	Liu Yandong	1945	Position not yet assigned
Liu Yunshan	1947 ➡	Propaganda	Liu Yunshan UP	1947	Propaganda
Wang Lequan	1944 ➡	Xinjiang CCP Secretary	Wang Gang	1942	Vice Chair, CPPC?
Wang Zhaoguo	1941 ➡	United Front	Wang Lequan	1944	Xinjiang CCP Secretary
Wu Yi	1938	Vice Premier	Wang Qishan UP	1948	Beijing Mayor
Yu Zhengsheng	1945 ➡	Hubei CCP Secretary	Wang Yang ➡	1955	Guangdong CCP Secretary
Zeng Peiyan	1938	Vice Premier	Wang Zhaoguo	1941	United Front
Zhang Dejiang	1941 ➡	Guangdong CCP Secy.	Xu Caihou	1943	Vice Chair, CMC
Zhang Lichang	1939	Tianjin Mayor	Yu Zhengsheng UP	1945	Shanghai CCP Secretary
Zhou Yongkang	1942 UP	Public Security	Zhang Dejiang UP	1941	Vice Premier? He was born in 1946.
			Zhang Gaoli UP	1946	Tianjin CCP Secretary

Age requirement in 2007: who was born after 1940, in 2012: who was born after 1945.

Alternate

Wang Gang	1942

Figure 4: Personal changes of the 16th and 17th CPC National Congresses in 2002 and in 2007. Source: The 17th Party Congress: Informal Politics and Formal Institutions.[18]

At the 18th Party Congress in 2012 Xi Jinping was elected as the Secretary General of the Party and the first person in the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), with Li Keqiang as the second person of the top echelon. In 2013 Xi Jinping became the president of the People's Republic of China and Li Keqiang was appointed as the premier of the State Council during the first session of the 12th National People's Congress (NPC). The third member of the PBSC was Zhang Dejiang (张德江, born in November 1946) who became the chairman of the NPC in 2013. The fourth person was Yu Zhengsheng (俞正声, born in April 1945), who became the chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in 2013. The fifth person was Li Yunshan (刘云山, born in July 1947) who was the secretary of the Central Committee of the CPC. The sixth person was Wang Qishan (王岐山, born in July 1948), the chairman of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. The seventh person was Zhang Gaoli (张高丽, born in November 1946) who was one of the vice-premiers of the State Council. Zhang Gaoli has recently been mentioned in several articles[19] in connection with a sexual harassment case against Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai. All the

[18] Joseph FEWSMITH: The 17th Party Congress: Informal Politics and Formal Institutions, *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 23, p 6.
[19] Nectar GAN – Steve GEORGE: Who is Zhang Gaoli? The man at the center of Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai's #MeToo allegation, [online], 2021. 11. 25. Source: CNN [2022. 04. 24.]

leaders to the Politburo Standing Committee arrived from the Politburo of the 17th Party Congress, so nobody jumped two positions, and nobody arrived directly from the Central Committee.

In 2017 only those leaders could continue serving the country and the party who were under 67 years old (born after 1950). According to the special 67-In-68-Out rule only Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang could go on to the 19th Party Congress. However, at the 14th National People's Congress in March 2018 Wang Qishan was appointed as the vice-president of the People's Republic of China, which means that the Party Congress in November 2017 might have made a decision about the new rule that would say '70 is still OK', which is an important factor in the 20th Party Congress.

In the 19th Party Congress five of the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee were replaced. Xi Jinping remained the Secretary General of the Party and the first member of the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC). Li Keqiang remained the second member of the PBSC. The third member is Li Zhanshu (栗战书, born in August 1950), who was the chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC). The fourth member is Wang Yang (汪洋, born in March 1955), who was chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). The fifth person was Wang Huning (王沪宁, born in October 1955), who is the secretary of the Central Committee of the CPC. The sixth person was Zhao Leji (赵乐际, born in March 1957), the chairman of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. The seventh person was Han Zheng (韩正, born in April 1954), who is the first vice-premier of the State Council. The state positions had been delegated at the first session of the 13th National People's Congress in 2018. Looking at the age of the top leaders of the 19th Party Congress, it is clear that Li Zhanshu is not suitable for another term in the leadership because he will be 72 years old during the 20th Party Congress, but all the others can have another five-year term.

Prospects for Politburo appointments

The age of Politburo members is also telling, when we consider who must leave and who has one or more five-year-mandate in the leadership, as reported in the US Congressional Research Service's overview in Figure 5.[20]

[20] Susan V. Lawrence – Mari Y. Lee: China's Political System in Charts: A Snapshot Before the 20th Party Congress, [online], 2021. 11. 24. Source: Congressional Research Service [2022. 09. 24.]

Figure 5: Members of the Politburo Standing Committee of the 19th Party Congress. Source: China's Political System in Charts.[21]

One can see who should leave the Politburo, because he is older than 70 at the time of the Party Congress: Li Zhanshu (栗战书, born in August 1950), the third member of the Politburo Standing Committee who turned 72 in 2022. The other six persons of the leadership will probably continue in the top echelon. At the same time there are some expectations, for example that the former Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Chen Quanguo (陈全国, born in November 1955) will be promoted during the 20th Party Congress.[22] Thus, there is only one out of the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee of the 19th Party Congress who must leave the body due to reaching the retirement age. It is expected that Chen Quanguo will become the new member and two representatives of the new generation of the leadership will be promoted to the Standing Committee. It means that the Standing Committee should be extended to nine members for the 20th Party Congress, as it had already been between 2002 and 2012.

In the Politburo, Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪, born in May 1950), the head of the Foreign Affairs Commission, the No. 1 diplomat of the People's Republic of China, Liu He (刘鹤, born in January 1952), a vice-premier of the State Council, Sun Chunlan (孙春兰, born in May 1950) another vice-premier of the State Council, Wang Chen (王晨, born in December 1950), who is vice chairman of the NPC, are the ones who will probably leave their leadership positions. The two vice-chairmen of the Central Military Commission, Xu Qiliang (许其亮, born in March 1950) and Zhang Youxia (张又侠, born in July 1950) must leave due to their age as well.

Analysts point out that beyond the anticorruption drive there are also attempts to make the party an increasingly rules-based organization during the reign of Xi Jinping.[23] Xi Jinping will not ignore the most important and concrete rule of personnel changes, the regulation concerning the retirement age of the

[21] Susan V. Lawrence – Mari Y. Lee: China's Political System in Charts: A Snapshot Before the 20th Party Congress, ibid, p. 12.
[22] New Party chief for Xinjiang appointed, [online], 2021. 12. 25. Source: China Daily [2022. 04. 24.]
[23] William Zheng: Xi Jinping's new rules reshape China's Communist Party decision-making, [online], 2021. 08. 13. Source: South China Morning Post [2022. 04. 24.]

leaders. The Party Constitution states that '*Party members in leadership positions at every level, whether elected through democratic procedures or appointed by a leading body, do not hold posts for life and can be transferred from, or relieved of their posts. Officials whose age and health make them unfit to continue working should retire according to state regulations.*'[24] So we can expect that Xi Jinping will not be the one who would like to deter the party from the path that Deng Xiaoping defined in the 1980s. Assuming that Xi Jinping will leave his office in 2027 reaching the maximum age of 75 in 2028, the Party must find the new generation of leaders who were born after 1961 or 1962 and who will be younger than 65 in 2027 to lead the party and the country for 10 years and retire before the age of 75.

In the Politburo of the 19th Party Congress there are two members who were born after 1961, Hu Chunhua (胡春华, born in April 1963), one of the vice-premiers of the State Council, who was one of the candidates for the generation change in 2017 as well, and Ding Xuexiang (丁薛祥, born in September 1962) who is the head of the Secretariat of the President of the PRC and the Secretary General of the CPC. If they insist on the rules that the new leaders of the Politburo Standing Committee should come from the Political Committee, it means that only these two persons can represent the future generation of the leadership. Some Chinese experts do not believe that Ding Xuexiang can become a future top leader of the party because he misses the experience of the provincial party leadership. Hu Chunhua has vast experience in the provinces, because he was party leader of Guangdong Province and earlier was the leader of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region.

Figure 6 shows the biographic data of the former top leaders, and it is true that all of them were provincial party leaders during their political carriers so it would be unusual if Ding Xuexiang would become one of the top leaders.

[24] Article 38, Constitution of the Communist Party of China, ibid, p. 23.

Former and current leaders experience

Name	born	PBSC	PB	CC	ALT CC	PS	GOV	Group?
Jiang Zemin	Aug 1928	1989	1987	1982	-	Shanghai (Mayor as well)	minister of commerce, minister of electronics	Jiang
Li Peng	Oct 1928	1987	1987	1982	-	-	minister of electricity vice-premier	Deng
Hu Jintao	Dec 1942	1992	1992	1987	1982	Gansu, Guizhou, Tibet	-	Youth
Wu Bangguo	Jul 1941	2002	1992	1992	1982	Shanghai	-	Jiang
Wen Jiabao	Sept 1942	2002	1997	1987	-	-	deputy minister of mining, vice-premier	Hu
Jia Qinglin	Mar 1940	2002	1997	1992	-	Fujian, Beijing	-	-
Xi Jinping	Jun 1953	2007	2007	2002	1997	Fujian (dep) Zhejiang, Shanghai	CMC Office, military positions	Jiang
Li Keqiang	Jul 1955	2007	2007	1997	-	Henan, Liaoning	vice-premier	Hu
Sun Zhengcai	Sep 1963	-	2012	2007		Jilin, Chongqing	deputy minister of agriculture	Jiang
Hu Chunhua	Apr 1963	-	2012	2007	-	Tibet (dep.), Hebei (dep.), Inner Mongolia, Guangdong	vice-premier	Hu
Ding Xuexiang	Sept 1962	-	2017	2017	2012	Head of the Policy and Law Commission in Shanghai Head of the PS's office in Shanghai, Head of the Office of the Sec Gen, President since 2017	-	Xi

Former and current leaders experience

Name	born	PBSC	PB	CC	ALT CC	PS	GOV	Group?
Jiang Zemin	Aug 1928	1989	1987	1982	-	Shanghai (Mayor as well)	minister of commerce, minister of electronics	Jiang
Li Peng	Oct 1928	1987	1987	1982	-	-	minister of electricity vice-premier	Deng
Hu Jintao	Dec 1942	1992	1992	1987	1982	Gansu, Guizhou, Tibet	-	Youth
Wu Bangguo	Jul 1941	2002	1992	1992	1982	Shanghai	-	Jiang
Wen Jiabao	Sept 1942	2002	1997	1987	-	-	deputy minister of mining, vice-premier	Hu
Jia Qinglin	Mar 1940	2002	1997	1992	-	Fujian, Beijing	-	-
Xi Jinping	Jun 1953	2007	2007	2002	1997	Fujian (dep) Zhejiang, Shanghai	CMC Office, military positions	Jiang
Li Keqiang	Jul 1955	2007	2007	1997	-	Henan, Liaoning	vice-premier	Hu
Sun Zhengcai	Sep 1963	-	2012	2007		Jilin, Chongqing	deputy minister of agriculture	Jiang
Hu Chunhua	Apr 1963	-	2012	2007	-	Tibet (dep.), Hebei (dep.), Inner Mongolia, Guangdong	vice-premier	Hu
Ding Xuexiang	Sept 1962	-	2017	2017	2012	Head of the Policy and Law Commission in Shanghai Head of the PS's office in Shanghai, Head of the Office of the Sec Gen, President since 2017	-	Xi

(PBSC – Politburo Standing Committee, PB – Politburo, CC – Central Committee,
PS – Party Secretary, (dep) – deputy Party Secretary, GOV – Government, Group – Interest group)

Figure 6: Leadership experience of the former and potential new leaders of PRC. (Edited by the author.)

The other option is that the future leader(s) will directly come from the Central Committee, like in the case of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang in 2007.

Future leaders experience

Name	born	PBSC	PB	CC	ALT CC	PS	GOV	Group?
Hu Chunhua	Apr 1963	-	2012	2007	-	Tibet (dep.), Hebei (dep.), Inner Mongolia, Guangdong	vice-premier	Hu
Ding Xuexiang	Sept 1962	-	2017	2017	2012	- Head of the Office of SEC GEN	-	Xi
Zhang Guojing	Aug 1964	-	-	2012	2007	Chongqing (dep.), Tianjin (dep.) Liaoning PS	-	?
Wu Zhenglong	Nov 1964	-	-	2017	2012	Jiangsu (dep.) Jiangsu PS	-	?
Yuan Jiajun	Sept 1962	-	-	2017	2007	Zhejiang (dep.) Zhejiang	-	?
Yin Li	Aug 1962	-	-	2017	2012	Sichuan (dep.) Sichuan	deputy minister of health	?
Lu Hao	Jun 1967	-	-	2012	-	Beijing (dep.), Heilongjiang (dep.)	minister of national resources (since 2018)	

Hu Chunhua | Ding Xuexiang | Zhang Goujing | Wu Zhenglong | Yuan Jiajun | Yin Li | Lu Hao

Figure 7: Leadership experience of the potential new leaders of the PRC. (Edited by the author.)

Figure 7 shows that there are some very experienced members of the Central Committee who were born later than 1962 and have a lot of experience in the provinces and/or in the government. Zhang Guojiang (张国清, born in August 1964) could be a good potential candidate, because he is the Party Secretary of Liaoning Province, and was deputy party secretary in Beijing and Tianjin, two cities whose party secretary are normally members of the Politburo. From the government side we can identify Lu Hao (陆昊, born in June in 1967) as another acceptable candidate, because he has been the minister of national resources since 2018. Both have been members of the central Committee since 2012.

To make a forecast for the ongoing Party Congress, we must mention another unwritten rule in the political sphere of the People's Republic of China: leaders would like to keep their influence in the Party by nominating their successors after their term in office is over. There are some analyses which show the division of the Communist Party of China by the different interest groups within the party. One of the most well-known researchers of the topic is Cheng Li, who claims in his study[25] that there were two strong distinct factions inside the CPC, the Youth League represented by Hu Jintao and the Shanghai circle represented by Jiang Zemin. Li Keqiang was the former leader of the Youth League and Xi Jinping was the party secretary of Zhejiang Province, and after that of Shanghai, so he was declared as the member of the Shanghai clique. According to recent research by Srijan Shukla,[26] the strongest faction of the CPC is led by Xi Jinping which is a new Xi clique, however the other two still exist.

If we look at the biography of Hu Chunhua and Ding Xuexiang, on the one hand we can see that Hu Chunhua was the chairman of the Youth League. On the other hand, Ding Xuexiang was the personal secretary of Xi Jinping when he was the Party Secretary in Shanghai city in 2017 and has been his secretary since he was the Secretary General of the Party since 2012. Thus, he can be considered as member of the

[25] Cheng Li: A Biographical and Factional Analysis of the Post-2012 Politburo, *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 41, 2012.
[26] Srijan Shukla: The Rise of the Xi Gang: Factional politics in the Chinese Communist Party, [online], 2021. 02. 12. Source: Observer Research Foundation [2022. 04. 24.]

Shanghai group, but perhaps has a stronger affiliation to Xi's group. The two persons together could well represent the current power-sharing arrangement in the future leadership.

My forecast is that Hu Chunhua will become the successor of Xi Jinping, and Ding Xuexiang will be the second person in the leadership of the party. In this case, leadership will be in the hands of the Youth League during the next generation, as it was before the generation of the leaders led by Xi Jinping, but Xi's interest would also be vested. This would mean that power-sharing within the party continued in the way it had been in the past.

Furthermore, one cannot absolutely exclude those theories in Western media that Xi Jinping will want to have all the power alone and perhaps stay beyond 75 years of age. The most important decision in the 20th Party Congress, which will either prove or disprove these theories, will regard the fate of Li Keqiang.[27] He finishes his second mandate as the premier of the State Council, so it is with high probability that he will not continue[28] as the head of the government. However, we have seen several cases from previous governments above where the state position of the second member of the Politburo Standing Committee was not the premier, but the chairman of the National People Congress – like between 1997 and 2002, the last term of Jiang Zemin; and between 2002 and 2012 during the leadership of Hu Jintao. Thus, the question is not what state position Li Keqiang would hold in the future, but whether Li Keqiang could continue as the second member of the leadership of the party, hand in hand with Xi Jinping. The other main question of the congress is whether the successors would be elected to the top leadership for the sake of possible generational change in 2027, and for providing five years of experience for the new generation before taking power in the 21st Party Congress in 2027 as it happened in the case of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang between 2007 and 2012.

Expected changes in the Central Military Commission

There are two Central Military Commissions, one is elected by the Central Committee of the CPC and the other is elected by the National People's Congress. The first one is the Central Military Commission of the Communist Party of China (CPC CMC - 中国共产党中央军事委员会), the other one is the Central Military Commission of the People's Republic of China (PRC CMC - 中华人民共和国中央军事委员会). The CMC of the CPC is elected earlier than the other one, so the important decision is undertaken by the Central Committee of the Party Congress, while the election of the state CMC is only a formality some months later, when the same persons are elected to the state CMC as the members of the party CMC.

The CMC of the 19th Party Congress is composed of a chairman - Xi Jinping, the secretary general of the Communist Party of China and the president of the People's Republic of China –, two vice-chairmen and four members. The two vice-chairmen, General Xu Qiliang (许其亮, born in March 1950) and General Zhang Youxia (张又侠, born in July 1950) are also members of the Politburo. The members of the CMC are all in the Central Committee of the CPC. The four members have a specific military position as well, General Wei Fenghe (魏凤和, born February 1954) is the minister of National Defense, the first member of the CMC. It is important to mention that in China the Ministry of National Defense does not exist in a way as in the Western world, where there exists no such institution as Ministry of National Defense. The functions of the Ministry of Defense in Western countries are carried by the CMC. The main function of the minister for National Defense is to be the counterpart of the ministers of defense of other countries. The second member is General Li Zuocheng (李作成, born October 1953), who is the chief of the Joint Staff Department. The third member is Admiral Miao Hua (苗华, born November 1955) who is the head of the Political Work Department. The fourth member is General Zhang Shengmin (张升民, born August 1958), who is the head of the PLA's and CMC's Discipline Inspection Commission and deputy head of the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection.

[27] John S. Van Oudenaren: China in 2022: Xi's Time is Only Beginning, But Where Will it Lead?, [online], 2021. 12. 17. Source: The Jamestown Foundation [2022. 04. 24.]

[28] Li Keqiang has already stated that he will not serve another term as premier of the State Council, which will be made official at the National People's Congress (NPC) in March 2023. Source: China's Premier Says Term Ending as Questions Over Xi Future Remain, [online], 2022. 03. 11. Source: The Jamestown Foundation [2022. 09. 24.]

If we look at the ages of the officials in the CMC, it is clear that the two vice-chairmen, General Xu Qiliang and General Zhang Youxia should retire before the 20th Party Congress, because both of them are older than 70. On the other hand, the chairman and all the members can have one more mandate to fill until their retirement at the age of 75. Before making a forecast about the future composition of the CMC, it is worth to have a historical review how the CMC was organized in the past.

Until 1983 there was only one CMC, the Central Military Commission of the Communist Party of China, when the National People's Congress decided to establish the CMC of the People's Republic of China.[29] The end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s was a turbulent period in the history of the People's Republic of China due to the massacre in Tiananmen Square in June 1989. As a result, there were several unplanned personnel changes in the CMC and in the leadership of the Communist Party of China.

At the beginning of the 15th Party Congress, in September 1997, the CMC had a chairman, two vice-chairmen and four members, but as a result of personal changes, the total number of leaders and members of the CMC changed from seven to eleven, and in the end all the four main headquarters of the PLA, the Joint Staff Department, the Political Department, the Logistics Department and the Armament Department got representation by the leader of each organization.

During the 16th Party Congress, in November 2002, four members of the CMC left the leadership due to their age, the new members elected by the 16th Party Congress were General Liang Guanglie (梁光烈, born December 1940), the chief of General Staff, General Li Jinai (李继耐, born July 1942), the head of the Armament Department, and General Liao Xilong (廖锡龙, born June 1940), the head of Logistics Department. Another significant change occurred in the structure of the CMC when in September 2004 the plenary session of the CPC Central Committee decided to add the commander of the forces of the PLA to the CMC.

In 2007, during the 17th party Congress, there was only a small adjustment in the composition of the Central Military Commission, because it was a midterm party congress: one more member position was added to the CMC as the Minister of National Defense became the fourth-ranking member of the CMC after the chairman and the two vice-chairmen.

In October 2010, during the 5th Plenary Session of the 17th Party Congress, Xi Jinping, the vice-president of the PRC, the sixth member of the Politburo Standing Committee became vice-chairman of the CMC.

During the 18th Party Congress, in November 2012, the new generation of leadership got in position with Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang at the lead, and a new CMC was elected. All the members of the 17th Party Congress CMC, who were born before 1945, left the body for retirement. General Fan Changlong (范长龙, born May 1947), the former commander of the Jinan Military Region became vice-chairman of the Central Military Committee, and became the only vice-chairman who took the position without having served as a member of the CMC before, in the recent history of the CMC. He was alternate member of the Central Committee from 2002 and member of the CC from 2007. General Xu Qiliang (许其亮, March 1950), the former commander of the Air Force took over the other vice-chairman's position, who was alternate member of the CC from 1997 and member of the CC from 2002. Both became members of the CPC Politburo. The CMC of the 18th Party Congress had eight members.

We can draw conclusions through analyzing the changes in the composition of the CMC in the last 25 years. Most of the time all the four main departments of the CMC (General Staff, Political, Logistics, Armament) were represented in the CMC and the commanders of the services (Navy, Air Force, Second Artillery) were represented in the CMC between 2004 and 2017. The number of vice-chairmen of the CMC was two or three, and the number of members varied between four and seven in the period of 1997–2022, but before generation change the designated new top leader became vice-chairman of the CMC. Age is the crucial factor driving the changes in the CMC.

During the reform process a new Army and a new Strategic Support Force headquarters were established, and later the HQ of Joint Logistic Support Forces was also set up, though one level lower than the

[29] 中华人民共和国中央军事委员会 [Central Military Commission of the People's Republic of China], [online]. Source: Baidu Baike [2022. 04. 24.]

other two new services, so the number of services changed from three to six by 2017.[30] In 2017 the head of the CMC Discipline Inspection Department, the deputy head of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection became member of the CMC. Thus, if the Minister of National Defense, the chief responsible for discipline, all the services and all the main departments were represented, the number of the members of CMC would be 12, hence including the chairman and the vice-chairmen, the CMC would have been composed of 15 persons in total.

It seems that in 2017 there was a decision to keep the CMC as small as possible, therefore only four members, two main HQs of the PLA, the Joint Staff Department and the Political Work Department have been represented in the body. Historical data shows that most of the time the leaders of all four departments were present in the CMC, therefore we can expect that the leaders of the two other HQs, the Logistic Support Department and the Armament Development Department will return to the CMC.

General Wei Fenghe is spending his second mandate as the member of the CMC, and now he is the first member of the body, so he has a good chance to become one of the vice-chairmen of the CMC. The other vice-chairman can come from among the current members of the CMC or be somebody from the Central Committee, appointed directly as it happened in 2012 in the case of General Fan Changlong.

[30] Liu Hui: Graphics: Reform in China's national defense and armed forces, [online], 2019. 12. 25. Source: CGTN [2022. 04. 24.]

Prom.	Name	Name	Born	CC	Alt CC	Disc. Com.	Current position	Former position
07. 2016	Yi Xiaoguang	乙晓光	06.1958	2017	2012	-	?	COM CTC, DCHOD, COM ETC AF
07. 2017	Gao Jin	高津	04.1959	2017	2012	-	COM LSD	COM AMS COM SSF
07. 2019	Li Shangfu	李尚福	02.1958	2017	-	-	COM EDD	DCOM EDD DCOM SSF
07. 2019	Zhu Shengling	朱生岭	11.1957	2017	-	-	PC CTC	PC PAP PC MBD
07. 2019	Ding Laihang	丁来杭	09.1957	2017	-	-	?	COM PLAAF COM NTC
07. 2019	Zheng He	郑和	11.1958	2017	-	-	PC NDU	COM NDU COM AMS COM TRD
12. 2019	He Ping	何平	11.1957	2017	-	2012	PC ETC	DPC WTC
12. 2019	Li Qiaoming	李桥铭	04.1961	2017	-	-	COM NTC	COM NTC A
12. 2019	Zhou Yaning	周亚宁	12.1957	2017	-	-	COM RF	DCOM RF
12. 2019	Li Fengbiao	李凤彪	10.1959	2017	-	-	PC WTC	COM SSF, DCOM CTC
12. 2019	Yang Xuejun	杨学军	04.1963	2017	-	2012	COM AMS	Different pos. in AMS
07. 2020	Xu Zhongbo	徐忠波	?. 1960	-	2017	-	PC RF	PC LSD PC WTC A
12. 2020	Guo Pujiao	郭普校	01.1964	-	-	-	PC LSD	PC CTC AF
12. 2020	Liu Wei	李伟	09.1960	-	-	-	PC SSF	PC in Xinjiang
12. 2020	Wang Chunning	王春宁	03.1963	-	2017	-	COM PAP	COM Beijing Garrison
07. 2021	Wang Xiubin	王秀斌	03.1964	-	2017		COM STC	DCOM ETC
07. 2021	Xu Qiling	徐起零	07.1962	-	-	-	? (DCHOD?)	COM WTC COM WTC A
07. 2021	Liu Zhenli	刘振立	08.1964	2017	-	-	COM PLAA	COS PLAA COS PAP
07. 2021	Ju Qiansheng	巨乾生	05.1962	-	-	-	COM SSF	DCOM SSF
09. 2021	Wang Haijiang	汪海江	10.1963	-	-	-	COM WTC	COM Tibet Garrison
09. 2021	Lin Xiangyang	汪海江	10.1964	-	-	-	COM ETC	COM CTC COM CTC A
09. 2021	Dong Jun	董军	?	-	-	-	COM Navy	COM STC COM South Fleet
09. 2021	Chang Dingqiu	常丁求	1967	-	2017	-	COM Air Force	DCHOD COM STC AF
09. 2021	Xu Xueqiang	许学强	?	-	-	-	COM NDU	COM NTC AF COS STC AF
01. 2022	Li Yuchao	李玉超	?.1964	-	2017	-	COM RF	DCOM RF COM RF Base

(CC – member of the Central Committee, Alt. CC – Alternate member of the CC, Disc. – member of the Central Discipline Inspection Commission, COM – Commander, PC – Political Commissar, DCOM- Deputy Commander, DPC – Deputy Political commissar, CTC, NTC, ETC, STC, WTC – Central, North, East, South, West Theatre Command, AMS – Academy of Military Science, NDU – National Defence University, CHOD – Chief of Joint Staff Department, EDD – Equipment Development Department, LSD – Logistic Support Department, PAP – People's Armed Police, AF – PLA Air Force, A – PLA Army, RF – PLA Rocket Force, SSF –PLA Strategic Support Force, TRD – Training Department, MBD – Mobilisation Department)

Figure 8: Participation in the CPC decision-making bodies of the current leaders of the PLA.

Figure 8 offers an overview of military leaders' role in the leadership of the CPC, and promotions to the rank of general in the last six years[31] based on available information at the Baidu websites. (Promotions in 2022 had been excluded because there was very limited data available about the newly promoted generals, except for General Li Yuchao, commander of the PLA Rocket Force, who is alternate member of the Central Committee.) According to Figure 8, General Yi Xiaoguang has one more year before retirement at the age of 65 as a theatre-level commander, but his position is not known now. He is member of the Central Committee, and he was alternate member of the CC between 2012 and 2017. Perhaps he is preparing for a higher position including one in the CMC, or he is under investigation. He was the deputy chief

[31] 中国人民解放军上将 [Generals of the PLA], [online]. Source: Baidu Baike [2022. 04. 24.]

of the Joint Staff Department during the time of General Fang Fenghui who was sentenced for life in prison for corruption.

General Gao Jin is one of the most experienced generals of the PLA. He has been commander of Academy of Military Science, commander of the PLA Strategic Support Force, and now he is the head of the Logistic Support Department. He is member of the Central Committee, and he was alternate member of CC between 2012 and 2017. He has a good chance of becoming a member of the CMC.

General Li Shangfu, the head of the Equipment Development Department has been member of the CC since 2017. He has a chance of becoming a member of the extended CMC, which will include the head of the Logistics and Equipment Departments.

It is worth following the career of General Li Fengbiao, who is now the political commissar of the Western Theatre Command. Earlier he was commander of the Strategic Support Force, deputy commander of the Central Theatre Command, and he has also been the commander of the 15th Air Assault Corps of the Air Force, which would be one of the most important units in case of war in the Taiwan Straits.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the most probable personnel changes that could happen during the 20th Congress will be based on the age of the leaders, what has always been the case in the last five Party Congresses. However, former personnel changes show that unexpected developments have also happened during the last congresses, therefore it is impossible to give a very precise forecast in the closed political environment of the People's Republic of China.

The most important factor defining personnel changes remains the age of the leaders in the 20th Party Congress, as it was in earlier party congresses. Only Li Zhanshu, the current third leader of the Party and the chairman of the National People's Congress will leave the top decision-making body, the Politburo Standing Committee, because he is older than 70. Li Keqiang, the second person of the Party, the premier of the State Council will remain the second person of the Party, but probably will not continue in the premier position, and could become the new chairman of the NPC in his last 5-year-term, as was the case between 1997 and 2002. The candidate with the best chance for the No. 1 position of the new generation of leadership, to lead the Communist Party of China and the People's Republic of China from 2027 is Hu Chunhua, vice-premier, member of the Politburo. There will be heated discussions about the future second leader, because the possible candidate from the Politburo, Ding Xuexaing is inexperienced for the position, but he is quite close to Xi Jinping, the current leader of the Party, who could retire in 2027. The most experienced candidate for the second position is probably Zhang Guojiang, the party secretary of Liaoning Province or Lu Hao, the minister of national resources of the State Council, the government of PRC.

Chen Quanguo, the former party secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region will probably join the top leadership, the Politburo, as two new leaders of the next generation of the leadership will be included as well. Thus, the Politburo Standing Committee will probably be extended to nine persons.

In the Central Military Commission, the two vice-chairmen will retire in the 20th Party Congress, because both are older than 70. General Wei Fenghe, the current Minister of National Defense, the No. 1 member of the CMC has the best chance for gaining one of the vice-chairmen positions, because he is the most experienced member who joined the body as the commander of the Second Artillery in 2012. During the 20th Party Congress, or maybe later, the No. 1 person of the new generation of the leadership will join the CMC as a first vice-chairman, so the number of vice-chairmen will increase to three. The third vice-chairman could be General Li Zoucheng, the chief of the Joint Staff Department or Admiral Miao Hua, the head of the Political Work Department. There is a good chance that the heads of the Logistic Support Department and the Equipment Development Department will join the CMC, thus changing the number of members to six, what is still not as many as it was before 2017. In this case, General Gao Jin, the head of the Logistic Department and General Li Shangfu, the head of the Equipment Development Department would join the CMC. General Yi Xiaoguang, the former commander of the Central Theatre Command is one of the most experienced generals in the PLA, because he is originally from the Air Force, he was deputy chief of Joint Staff Department, alternate member of the Central Committee from 2012 and member from 2017. He may replace General Li Zuocheng in the position of the chief of the Joint Staff Department, and the latter can join as vice-chairman of the CMC.

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