

## **Hu Jintao: The Making of a Chinese General Secretary**

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**ABSTRACT** Chinese Vice-President Hu Jintao, Jiang Zemin's heir apparent, has risen to the elite levels of Chinese politics through skill and a diverse network of political patrons. Hu's political career spans four decades, and he has been associated with China's top leaders, including Song Ping, Hu Yaobang, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin. Though marked early as a liberal by his ties to Hu Yaobang, Hu Jintao's conservative credentials were fashioned during the imposition of martial law in Tibet in 1989. Those actions endeared him to the Beijing leadership following the 4 June Tiananmen Square crackdown, and his career accelerated in the 1990s. Young, cautious and talented, Hu catapulted to the Politburo Standing Committee, the vice-presidency and the Central Military Commission. Despite recent media attention, Hu's positions on economic and foreign policy issues remain poorly defined. As the 16th Party Congress approaches, Hu is likely to be preparing to become General Secretary of the Communist Party and a force in world affairs.

The late 1990s witnessed the extraordinary rise of Vice-President Hu Jintao from obscurity to pre-eminence as one of China's most powerful politicians and President Jiang Zemin's heir apparent. If Hu succeeds Jiang, he will lead China's 1.3 billion people into a new era. Over the next decade, he would manage China's emergence as a global power – a leading country with one of the world's largest economies, nuclear weapons and a seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Despite his importance, however, Hu Jintao's personal life and his political views remain opaque because he is an expert at avoiding attention and has only recently served in prominent positions. Yet Hu's political career spans decades and he has been personally involved in crucial events in modern Chinese politics: the suppression of Tibetan uprisings, the aftermath of Tiananmen, and the pivotal 14th Party Congress. Within the Chinese political system, Hu is well known and has an imposing reputation. He has received personal endorsements from China's highest leaders, including Deng Xiaoping. As Jiang Zemin's likely successor at the 16th Party Congress this autumn and the National People's Congress in 2003, Hu Jintao is positioned to become China's political head and a force in world affairs.

One of the most notable aspects of Hu Jintao's career is that he has survived as heir apparent for so long. Chinese politics is littered with potential successors destroyed by factional warfare. Hu's remarkable career is a product of his personal attributes, his political acumen and his talent for navigating factional conflict. Hu is also cautious and has avoided political mis-steps. Unlike most high officials who have developed traditional power bases through military leadership or administering major provinces, Hu built his political power through expertise in personnel and ideological matters. He cultivated a diverse set of powerful

patrons whose ideological outlooks ranged from extreme conservatism to liberal reform. Four powerful mentors were instrumental to Hu's success: Gansu Party secretary Song Ping, Premier Hu Yaobang, Deng Xiaoping and President Jiang Zemin. Moreover, Jiang's current support makes Hu Jintao one of China's most powerful figures and Hu is a component in Jiang's apparent plan to retain power after the 16th Party Congress.

Jiang Zemin is expected to relinquish his positions as general secretary of the Communist Party at the 16th Party Congress in the autumn of 2002 and as president in 2003. Hu could ascend to any or all of Jiang's three major positions: president, general secretary or chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC). Most probably, Hu will become general secretary in 2002 as Jiang has surpassed age limitations, and protocol is pressuring him to step down. Hu may also gain the presidency in 2003, because China's constitution requires Jiang to resign that post. The CMC does not require Jiang to resign the chairmanship, but Hu could also become chairman if Jiang relinquishes that post.

Hu Jintao has become Jiang's successor for several reasons. First, Hu is young (aged 59), capable of leading China for many years, and he is a central figure in China's fourth-generation leadership. Secondly, Hu is broadly appealing. His political beliefs are economically mainstream but politically conservative. Hu advocates reforming China's economy, but steadfastly defends the Communist Party's monopolization of political power, making him a "moderate" with wide appeal. Thirdly, Deng's personal endorsement of Hu has carried enduring influence. Next, Hu and Jiang appear to have a solid working relationship, and Jiang has supported several of Hu's key promotions. Finally, Hu has not yet built his own political faction. Although he is associated with the Qinghua and Communist Youth League factions, he will probably owe his ultimate political fortunes to Jiang Zemin and other important sponsors who facilitated his ascent and he may remain reliant on them for some time.

#### *Hu Jintao's Personal History*

*The young Hu Jintao.* Hu Jintao was born in December 1942. Although official sources put his birthplace as Anhui's Jixi county, other accounts have reported that he was born in Shanghai.<sup>1</sup> Little is known about Hu's family background except that his father was an accountant at a local household supplies store.<sup>2</sup> His mother died when he was young. Hu and his two sisters grew up into Taizhou county, Jiangsu province.<sup>3</sup> He was only six years old when Mao proclaimed the founding of the

1. Hu's official biography lists Jixi, Anhui as his birthplace; however, other scholars say Hu was born in Shanghai, See Ren Zhichu, *Zhong-gong kua shijie ban ren: Hu Jintao (Hu Jintao: China's First Man in the 21st Century)* (Ontario: Mingjing chubanshe, 1997), p. 38.

2. " 'Biographical sketch' of Hu Jintao," *Ta kung pao (Dagong bao)*, Hong Kong, 29 June 1999.

3. Cheng Li, *China's Leaders: The New Generation* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), p. 116.

People's Republic, and the country experienced Land Reform and the Great Leap Forward before he reached adulthood.

In 1959, the 17-year-old Hu moved from Jiangsu to Beijing's north-western suburbs to attend Qinghua University, one of China's most prestigious universities. Indeed, Hu's association with Qinghua would be an important factor throughout his political career. Hu majored in hydroelectric engineering and specialized in fluvial multi-purpose power stations.<sup>4</sup> He met his future wife, Liu Yongqing, at Qinghua.<sup>5</sup> Hu and his wife have two children, a son and a daughter.

Hu joined the Communist Party in 1964 and graduated from Qinghua in 1965, just as the Cultural Revolution was consuming Beijing. This timing was fortuitous. Beijing's universities were soon closed because of the growing chaos, making him one of the last students to earn a degree before the educational system was frozen. He accepted a research position at Qinghua University and served as a political counsellor for the next two years.<sup>6</sup> Qinghua's political counsellors, created by university president Jiang Nanxiang, were "double-loaded" – selected as both technical experts and political leaders.<sup>7</sup> As the Cultural Revolution grew, Qinghua University became a headquarters for young Red Guard factions, but at the age of 23, Hu was too old to participate fully in the Red Guard movement composed of younger students.

The late 1960s marked the Cultural Revolution's most radical phase. Qinghua University was the site of extreme violence as clashes erupted between rival Red Guard factions, making Hu an eyewitness to the violent epicentre of Mao's Cultural Revolution. As Harry Harding notes: "At Beijing's Qinghua University, rival factions barricaded themselves in campus buildings behind cement barricades and wire fences, and used catapults to launch chunks of bricks and concrete against their adversaries."<sup>8</sup> The Red Guard factions also turned their aggression on school authorities and scholars. Like many of his intellectual counterparts, Hu came under pressure from these radical groups. He was criticized for being "too individualistic"<sup>9</sup> and charged with being a member of the "carefree clique."<sup>10</sup>

*The deserts of Gansu.* The chaos eventually grew too much for Mao, and he ended the mass movement by sending students to the countryside. Hu was sent to the Liujiaxia Hydraulic Power Plant in remote Gansu

4. " 'Biographical sketch'."

5. Ren Zhichu, *Hu Jintao*, p. 299.

6. "Hu Jintao," *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), viewed on 25 March 2002, <http://dRenglish.peopledaily.com.cn/data/people/hujintao.shtml> (date of publication not given).

7. Cheng Li, *China's Leaders*, p. 90.

8. Harry Harding, "The Chinese state in crisis, 1966–9," in Roderick MacFarquhar (ed.), *The Politics of China: The Eras of Mao and Deng* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 218.

9. David Hsieh, "Why Hu Jintao is Jiang's heir apparent," *Asiaweek*, 26 June 1998.

10. Ren Zhichu, *Hu Jintao*, p. 299.

province.<sup>11</sup> He spent more than a decade in Gansu, riding out the end of the Cultural Revolution and Mao's death in 1976. When Hu arrived in 1968, he first laboured in a housing construction brigade and then worked as a technician and deputy Party secretary in the engineering bureau under the Ministry of Water Resources and Electric Power.<sup>12</sup> This work marked the beginning of his involvement in Party affairs. In 1974, Hu was transferred to the Gansu Provincial Construction Committee and served as deputy head of the Project Design Management Division.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the arduous work, Gansu provided an opportunity for the young engineer to improve his political fortunes. Hu caught the attention of the powerful Gansu Party secretary, Song Ping.<sup>14</sup> Song's wife, Chen Shunyao, had been deputy Party secretary of Qinghua while Hu was studying there.<sup>15</sup> The conservative Song Ping liked Hu and became his first political patron. In 1980, Song made Hu deputy director of the Gansu Provincial Construction Committee, a major promotion.<sup>16</sup> Soon, Hu was appointed secretary of the Gansu Provincial Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League, a crucial opportunity that marked the beginning of his long-term involvement in youth and personnel affairs.<sup>17</sup> Later, under Song's direction, Hu left Gansu for political instruction at Beijing's prestigious Central Party School (Party School of the Central Committee), a training centre for young Party leaders. The young Hu Jintao was rising rapidly and Song had given him a chance to return to Beijing, China's political proving ground.

*Hu Yaobang: a liberal mentor.* In Beijing, fortune smiled upon the aspiring young leader. Jiang Nanxiang, former Qinghua University president and longtime ally of Hu Yaobang, was serving as vice-president of the Central Party School.<sup>18</sup> As the 12th Party Congress approached in 1982, Premier Hu Yaobang, Deng Xiaoping's chosen successor and powerful reformer, was troubled by the lack of young cadres on the Central Committee. He assigned a search-group the task of selecting young Party members qualified to serve on the Committee. The group began its hunt at the Central Party School in Beijing. One of its members recounts: "We picked [Hu] because he stood out above all the others. His was an easy choice, because what was rare at that time was that he had a university degree, and from Qinghua at that."<sup>19</sup> Once selected, Hu's

11. David Hsieh, "A man for all seasons," *Asiaweek*, 26 June 1998.

12. "Hu Jintao," *Renmin ribao*.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Bruce Gilley, *Tiger on the Brink: Jiang Zemin and China's New Elite* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.308.

15. Cheng Li, *China's Leaders*, p. 117

16. Xiao Yu, "Poliburo's rising star set for shining future," *The South China Morning Post*, 30 January 1996.

17. "Hu Jintao," *Renmin ribao*.

18. Murray Scott Tanner, "After Jiang, Hu? Can Hu Jintao beat the 'successor's dilemma'?" Asia Program Special Report, No. 96 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center, June 2001), p.9

19. "Hu Jintao: from water to political power," *The Straits Times*, Singapore, 5 April 1998.

political portfolio expanded dramatically. The 12th Party Congress elected him an alternate member of the Central Committee.<sup>20</sup> Building on his Youth League experience in Gansu, Hu was also appointed Secretary of the Communist Youth League Central Committee and he became President of the All-China Youth Federation the next year.<sup>21</sup>

While in Beijing, Hu Jintao forged a personal relationship with Premier Hu Yaobang. Despite prior associations with the conservative Song Ping, Hu Yaobang was impressed with the aspiring Hu Jintao and became his second major political patron, indicating Hu's ability to work with and impress diverse sponsors. In the spring of 1984, Hu Jintao accompanied Hu Yaobang on inspection tours of Hubei, Henan and Guizhou provinces.<sup>22</sup> On the tours, Hu Yaobang stressed further agricultural reforms, and he urged promotions for younger cadres because they were capable, had broad knowledge and were "less affected by past convictions."<sup>23</sup>

Hu Jintao's association with Hu Yaobang marked him as a liberal. In November 1984, at Hu Yaobang's urging, Hu Jintao became leader of the Chinese Communist Youth League, the world's largest youth organization with approximately 50 million members.<sup>24</sup> Hu Yaobang had been the general secretary of the Youth League and retained tremendous influence.<sup>25</sup> Also, in early 1985 in probably his first trip abroad, Hu Jintao travelled to North Korea to visit Chinese exchange students.<sup>26</sup>

*Going to Guizhou.* In July 1985, Hu had a rare opportunity to leave the Youth League and enter executive office when he was appointed Party secretary of Guizhou, China's poorest province. He was 43 years old and the youngest provincial Party secretary in PRC history. His appointment was probably a result of his association with Hu Yaobang, and the transition both tested and heightened his leadership abilities. Moreover, the post strengthened his experience with minority populations, an important factor later in his career. In a speech in July 1985, Hu Jintao outlined his goals for Guizhou: "From the first day I arrived here, I have identified myself with developing and invigorating Guizhou's 176,000 sq km of land and making the province's 29 million people of all nationalities rich and happy."<sup>27</sup> He then outlined the four main components of his plan: utilizing knowledge and talent, strengthening popular unity, seeking pragmatic solutions, and persevering in reforms.

20. *Who's Who in China's Current Leadership* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1989), p.368

21. "All China Youth Federation elects new leaders," Xinhua overseas service, 23 August 1983.

22. Ren Zhichu, *Hu Jintao*, p. 304.

23. "Hu Yaobang inspects Henan and gives instructions," Henan provincial service, Zhengzhou, 7 April 1984 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

24. "Communist Youth League reports membership figures," Xinhua, 22 June 1988 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

25. Yang Zhongmei, *Hu Yaobang* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1988), p. 25.

26. Ren Zhichu, *Hu Jintao*, p. 306.

27. "New Guizhou leader outlines tasks at forum attended by Zhu Houze," Guizhou provincial services, Guiyang, 22 July 1985 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

As Guizhou Party secretary from 1985 to 1988, Hu Jintao did not distinguish himself and instituted no major reforms. Still, he made his mark locally. One of his first actions was to embark on an 11-day tour of villages and factories in Guizhou's western border areas.<sup>28</sup> By the time he left Guizhou in 1988, he had visited all 86 counties, cities and districts; often inspecting the poorest areas and gaining a personal understanding of Guizhou's needs.<sup>29</sup> As provincial Party secretary, Hu also hosted the nation's highest leaders, including Hu Yaobang, Zhao Ziyang and Li Peng, while they made inspection tours.<sup>30</sup>

As Guizhou Party secretary, Hu began to gain international exposure by meeting foreign officials. In 1986, he received the Australian governor general and met Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke in Canberra.<sup>31</sup> At the invitation of the French Communist Party, Hu travelled to France in July 1988.<sup>32</sup> In Guizhou, he also began formulating his position towards maintaining social stability. Recognizing the importance of economic development for all Chinese, Hu stated that, "we cannot have political stability and unity and economic prosperity ... without the equality and solidarity of all nationalities."<sup>33</sup> He tempered his beneficent remarks, however, when discussing social unrest. As student demonstrations rocked Chinese universities in 1985, Hu said that "if big-character posters and other practices prevalent during the Cultural Revolution were allowed today, it would jeopardize social stability, scuttle socialist modernization, and hamper the democratic rights of the people."<sup>34</sup>

In January 1987, while Hu Jintao was in Guizhou, conservative leaders forced Hu Yaobang's removal for failing to manage the student demonstrations. Despite the loss of this principal patron, Hu displayed impressive political dexterity by continuing to advance his career. His gratitude to Hu Yaobang endured over the years. While on a trip to Hu Yaobang's hometown in Jiangxi a few years ago, he reportedly made a visit to Hu's tomb and shed tears for his deceased mentor.<sup>35</sup>

*Governing Tibet: Hu's greatest political challenge.* In late 1988, Hu faced the greatest challenge of his political career when he was asked to become Party secretary for the rebellious Tibetan Autonomous Region. While Hu was in Guizhou in the autumn of 1988, unrest was growing in

28. "His political advantages do not lie in his young age alone – biographical sketch of Hu Jintao when he led local governments," *Ta kung pao*, Hong Kong, 29 June 1999 (from FBIS).

29. "Hu Jintao," *Renmin ribao*.

30. Ren Zhichu, *Hu Jintao*, pp. 309–310.

31. "Chinese officials meet Governor-General of Australia," Xinhua, 12 March 1986, and "Hawke receives Chinese officials," Xinhua, 11 March 1986 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

32. "CCP cadres delegation for France to see French counterparts," Xinhua, 18 July 1988 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

33. "'Discrepancies and problems' in Guizhou nationality work," Guizhou provincial service, Guiyang, 15 September 1987 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

34. Jasper Becker, "Peking alert for student protest / demonstrations in China," *The Guardian*, 6 December 1985 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

35. Hsieh, "Heir apparent."

Tibet. At a festival in Lhasa, Tibet, in November, pro-independence demonstrators crowded the streets, and the police began a crackdown. Tibet Party Secretary Wu Jinghua was under pressure from Beijing to end the growing conflict. Despite his military background and non-Han ethnicity, Wu had tremendous difficulty quieting the province.<sup>36</sup> Unable to suppress the outbreak of violence in Lhasa, Wu Jinghua was recalled to Beijing and dismissed in 1988.<sup>37</sup>

On 9 December 1988, with Deng Xiaoping's support, Hu Jintao was appointed to fill Wu's position and given a mandate to end the disturbances.<sup>38</sup> Amid growing ethnic unrest, Hu became the first civilian Party secretary for the Tibet Autonomous Region in the history of the People's Republic.<sup>39</sup> He was chosen because of his young age (46), his ideological commitment, and the extensive experience in minority areas gained from his 14 years in Gansu and Guizhou.<sup>40</sup> He arrived in Lhasa on 14 January 1989.<sup>41</sup> In a January 1989 interview, Hu Jintao laid out his priorities: "Tibet is confronted with two major tasks. One is to safeguard unification of the motherland, adopt a clear-cut stand to oppose separatism, and stabilize the situation in Tibet; the other is to continue to carry out economic construction."<sup>42</sup> Events soon forced Hu to focus exclusively on suppressing separatism and to postpone economic construction.

As the 30th anniversary of the 10 March 1959 Tibetan uprising neared, the situation deteriorated dramatically. Police shot and killed dozens of protestors on 5 and 6 March. Reporting on the violence, the *New York Times* wrote that, "The new party secretary, Hu Jintao, had no sooner taken up his post than the police fired on protesters at a demonstration."<sup>43</sup> On 7 March Beijing imposed martial law in Tibet for the first time in 30 years. Hu acted decisively, co-ordinating the movement of People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops in Tibet to suppress the uprising. In a radio address on 9 March, Hu commanded security forces to crack down harder: "You must maintain vigilance against separatists now that martial law has been declared, and you must take even sterner measures against those who stubbornly resist."<sup>44</sup> Speaking to Xinhua reporters one week later, Hu stated: "The imposition of martial law, subduing the riots,

36. *Who's Who*, p. 746.

37. Tim Luard, "Tibet's Party chief sacked as tension rises again in Lhasa," *Daily Telegraph*, 7 December 1988.

38. See John Tkacik, "A biographical look at Vice President Hu Jintao," presented at The Heritage Foundation, Washington DC, 27 February 2002, p.6 (viewed on 9 June 2002 at [www.heritage.org/library/lecture/h1739.html](http://www.heritage.org/library/lecture/h1739.html)).

39. "Biographical sketch".

40. "Chinese replace leader of Tibet," Reuters, 6 December 1988.

41. Peng Weixiang, "New Tibetan Party secretary talks about future tasks," *Zhongguo xinwen she*, 25 January 1989 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

42. *Ibid.*

43. Nicholas Kristof, "11 killed in Tibet as rioters clash with the police," *The New York Times*, 6 March 1989.

44. David Holley, "Tibet expels foreigners, intensifies crackdown," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 March 1989.

stopping sabotage, opposing separatism and safeguarding unification, is a major measure to stabilize the situation in Tibet.”<sup>45</sup>

The response was swift and brutal. Scholars and journalists estimate that hundreds of Tibetans were killed and many more imprisoned during the period of martial law.<sup>46</sup> Martial law lasted nearly 14 months, ending when Li Peng lifted the order on 30 April 1990.<sup>47</sup> Commenting on the end of martial law, Hu said, “Situations in Tibet are stabilizing, victory has been scored in quelling Lhasa turmoil, and improvement and rectification have seen preliminary results.”<sup>48</sup>

In 2001, on the 50th anniversary of the Chinese occupation of Tibet, Hu delivered a speech and referred to the troubles in 1989. “The course of the 50 years of storms and vicissitudes has brought a great truth: it is only the leadership of the Communist Party of China, only in the embrace of the big family of the motherland ... that Tibet can enjoy today’s prosperity and progress ... This is the most important conclusion that we have drawn from the 50 years of Tibet’s development.”<sup>49</sup> Notably, Hu remains active in Tibetan issues, suggesting an enduring interest in the province.

*The aftermath of Tiananmen and Hu Jintao’s meteoric rise.* When Hu was suppressing riots in Lhasa during the spring of 1989, Deng Xiaoping and the Chinese leadership were facing a crisis in Beijing. The student-led democracy movement had occupied Tiananmen Square, paralysing the capital. (The Tiananmen demonstrations were sparked by the death of Hu Yaobang, Hu Jintao’s former patron.) On 4 June PLA soldiers opened fire on the demonstrators, killing several hundred civilians. Although the movement was crushed, China’s leadership faced a host of problems. Communism was in retreat world-wide. Zhao Ziyang, who had succeeded Hu Yaobang as Deng’s successor, was dismissed from office and arrested for siding with the demonstrators. The United States and other nations imposed economic sanctions on China. In short, Beijing was reeling as the communist leadership struggled to reconsolidate its authority.

Outrage over the brutal Tiananmen Square suppression threatened to ignite opposition in other areas of China. Although Hu Jintao maintained stability in Tibet, Shanghai and other areas surged in defiance. Deng Xiaoping delivered a crucial speech on television on a June, praising the military for “putting down the counter-revolutionary rebellion.”<sup>50</sup> Days later, Beijing television reported that Hu Jintao presided over a Tibet

45. “Other reports on Tibet; Hu Jintao says martial law does not change policy on Tibet,” Xinhua, 17 March 1989 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

46. “Chinese said to kill 450 Tibetans in 1989,” *New York Times*, 14 August 1990.

47. “Martial law enforcement troops leave Lhasa, thanked by Hu Jintao,” Xinhua, 30 April 1990 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

48. “Tibet Party chief views development,” *Renmin ribao*, 9 March 1990 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

49. “Full text of speech by Hu Jintao at Tibet’s peaceful liberation,” *Renmin ribao*, 20 July 2001.

50. Nicholas Kristoff, “Deng appears on Chinese TV, surrounded by hard-liners; Shanghai protesters rally,” *New York Times*, 10 June 1989.



Party committee meeting to study Deng's televised address.<sup>51</sup> Hu's meeting stressed that Deng's speech was vital to stabilizing Tibet and to safeguarding Party leadership. With such staunch display of loyalty, Hu was one of the first provincial leaders to demonstrate his allegiance to Deng and the centre after the 4 June crackdown.<sup>52</sup> His use of military force to suppress Tibetan unrest presaged the Tiananmen violence, demonstrated his strict conservatism and reaffirmed his loyalty to the besieged leadership.

In late 1990, Hu developed "altitude sickness" and left Lhasa to recuperate in Beijing. This respite gave him an opportunity to expand his network and political base in the capital. Although still Tibet Party secretary, Hu remained in Beijing for nearly two years. Because he was young, energetic and politically trustworthy, the top leadership gave him many important projects. He briefed Party elders, wrote reports and presided over government panels. He also became the *de facto* executive director of the powerful Communist Party Organization Department (under Song Ping) – a position that would serve him greatly in the future.<sup>53</sup>

During this period in Beijing, Hu personally impressed Deng Xiaoping. Deng reportedly praised Hu by saying, "I see this person Hu Jintao as not bad at all."<sup>54</sup> In January 1992, during his famous "southern tour" (*nanxun*), Deng again openly praised Hu.<sup>55</sup> Deng became Hu's third major political patron, and his personal endorsement solidified Hu's position within the top leadership. His political fortunes soared. Deng was so confident of Hu that he offered him the opportunity to lead organizational preparations for the important 14th Communist Party Congress.

*The 14th Party Congress.* The 14th Party Congress in late 1992 marked a major personal victory for Deng Xiaoping, elevated Jiang Zemin and significantly changed the Chinese leadership. Having defeated conservative challenges to his economic reforms, Deng's reform policies were fully endorsed in the congress report. Jiang Zemin presided over the meeting and became president, rounding out his positions as general secretary and chairman of the CMC, and securing his position as China's next paramount leader. Critical promotions were also on the table at the congress, and Hu Jintao played an important administrative role. He drafted paperwork for Jiang's elevation to the presidency, helped secure several Politburo positions for Jiang's allies, and bargained with Qiao Shi, Jiang's rival, over positions for Qiao supporters.<sup>56</sup> As older conservatives like Song Ping and Yao Yilin left office, the vacancies allowed for

51. "Other reports on the discussion of Deng's speech: Tibet Party Committee highly evaluates Deng's speech," Beijing Television, 14 June 1989 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

52. Hsieh, "Heir apparent."

53. Tkacik, "Vice President Hu Jintao," p.6

54. "Hu Jintao: from water to political power," *The Straits Times*, Singapore, 5 April 1998.

55. Peter Yu, "Hu's the one to succeed Jiang Zemin?" *The Straits Times*, Singapore, 28 August 1998.

56. Tkacik, "Vice President Hu Jintao," p.7

major personnel restructuring and the inclusion of young reformers, including Zhu Rongji and Liu Huaqing on the powerful Politburo Standing Committee. With Deng's direct support, Hu earned himself a seat on the Politburo Standing Committee and he added Party affairs to his portfolio.<sup>57</sup>

*The Central Party School.* Hu Jintao's next major advance came in 1993 when he became president of the Central Party School where he had studied after returning to Beijing in 1980. As president, he began grooming the political elite for future leadership positions and widening his political contacts among younger officials. At the school, Hu honed his expertise in personnel matters, paving the way for future participation in personnel decisions. He also became Jiang's deputy for a leading group on new cadres, an indication that the two were forming a working relationship.

As president of the Central Party School, Hu built a reputation for being an ideological authority and a skilful technocrat. Since his political counsellor days at Qinghua, he has believed that cadres should be both "red and expert" – technically skilled and politically disciplined. He believes these qualities are essential for the Party to meet the domestic challenges brought by modernization and globalization. Hu actively promoted Jiang's "three represents" campaign (*san ge daibiao*), that emphasizes making the Party relevant to contemporary conditions and is described as a major contribution to Chinese political theory.<sup>58</sup> In addition, the Politburo approved a leading group, headed by Hu Jintao and Ding Guangen, the Party propaganda chief, to compile *The Selected Works of Jiang Zemin*, a potentially important component in Jiang's legacy.<sup>59</sup>

*The Chen Xitong corruption scandal.* In early 1995, Jiang Zemin launched an anti-corruption drive that destroyed Chen Xitong, Politburo member, mayor of Beijing and Jiang's political rival. Hu Jintao's help managing the scandal reaffirmed his loyalty to Jiang, established their first serious co-operation and initiated Hu's involvement in high-level anti-corruption cases.

Chen had been mayor of Beijing since the 1980s, but was extremely corrupt. Though his graft blemished Jiang's record, Chen had also openly criticized Jiang's rule. In January 1995, Jiang opened an anti-corruption drive aimed at Chen that soon began unravelling a network of corruption.<sup>60</sup> Investigators implicated Chen and Beijing Vice-Mayor Wang Baosen for bribery involving the lavish Oriental Plaza planned for construction along Wangfujing Avenue. Chen resigned on 28 April and was expelled from the Party. As the shock waves from Chen's purge

57. Susan Lawrence, "Going west: Hu are you?" *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 October 2001.

58. "Chinese leader calls for proper study of Marxism," *Renmin ribao*, 2 March 2000.

59. Todd Crowell and David Hsieh, "Court intrigue," *Asiaweek*, 11 February 2000.

60. Gilley, *Tiger on the Brink*, p.242

spread and other officials were implicated, Hu Jintao played a critical role in managing the fall-out. According to Bruce Gilley, Hu Jintao, as Politburo Standing Committee member with special responsibility for Beijing and for Party affairs, was entrusted with explaining the reasons behind the purge to Beijing cadres.<sup>61</sup> On 29 April, the day after Chen stepped down, Xinhua reported that at a high-level meeting in Beijing, Hu Jintao announced that Wei Jianxing was replacing Chen as Beijing Party secretary: "Hu Jintao pointed out in his speech that the CCP Central Committee's decision is conducive to Beijing Municipality's stability, to its work proceeding smoothly in all respects, to deepening the anti-corruption struggle, and to the Party's cause."<sup>62</sup> Chen's removal was a major victory for Jiang. For Hu Jintao, the episode solidified Hu and Jiang's political relationship.

*Deng's passing and the end of an era.* Deng Xiaoping's death on 20 February 1997 brought China into a new political era. When Deng's ashes were scattered into the Bohai sea, Hu Jintao received an important honour symbolizing his closeness to Deng: Hu was the only Politburo member to accompany family members and former bodyguards to witness the ceremony.<sup>63</sup>

Deng's death quickly brought political changes to Beijing. At the 15th Party Congress in September 1997, Jiang declared that China should "hold high the banner of Deng Xiaoping Theory."<sup>64</sup> Deng Theory was subsequently incorporated into both the Party and state constitutions. Important personnel changes occurred as well. Li Peng remained on the Politburo Standing Committee, while Qiao Shi, Jiang's rival, lost his position on the standing committee. Given his expertise in personnel matters, Hu is believed to have managed the nomination process for new Central Committee members for this congress.<sup>65</sup> Notably, the first all-civilian Politburo Standing Committee since the Communist Revolution in 1949 was appointed.<sup>66</sup> This change supported the rise of technocrats and strengthened civilian control over the military, important developments for civilian leaders Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao.

*Hu gains the vice-presidency.* In March 1998 at the Ninth National People's Congress, Hu, at the age of 56, became the youngest vice-president in the history of the PRC.<sup>67</sup> Although the vice-presidency had been a largely ceremonial position, Hu Jintao was determined to make it a powerful post. In another stunning move at the session, the Party leadership declared that military, police and judicial units had to divest them-

61. *Ibid.* p.245

62. "Hu Jintao, Wei Jianxing to speak in Beijing," Xinhua, 29 April 1995 (FBIS).

63. Gilley, *Tiger on the Brink*, p.295

64. Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.192

65. Lyman Miller, "The road to the 16th Party Congress," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 1 (Winter 2002).

66. James Kynge, "Jiang picks his heir-apparent," *Financial Times*, 25 August 1998.

67. "Hu Jintao," *Renmin ribao*.

selves of their business interests. Hu was given the unenviable task of overseeing the closure of all PLA businesses and the transfer of assets to local authorities.<sup>68</sup> Xinhua quoted Hu as saying: “The move is part of the anti-corruption work in the army, the armed police and law-enforcement departments to protect their very nature.”<sup>69</sup> Condemning cases of corruption and fraud, Hu warned that “criminal responsibility must be sought against those who have committed crimes,”<sup>70</sup> and he later cautioned that the military “could become a hotbed of corruption.”<sup>71</sup>

In December 1998, Jiang chose Hu Jintao to represent China at the ASEAN meeting in Hanoi, bolstering Hu’s diplomatic credentials. The meeting marked Hu’s first opportunity to represent China at a top-level international conference, and he met other Asian leaders, including Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, South Korea President Kim Dae Jung, and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. As Asian economies struggled to recover from the Asian financial crisis, Hu reassured his colleagues by stating that China will “keep *renminbi* exchange rates stable, and continue to provide, within its capacity, relevant ASEAN countries with assistance.”<sup>72</sup> Although protocol would suggest that President Jiang or Premier Zhu Rongji attend the meeting, it appears that Jiang wanted Hu to improve his international and domestic stature. Furthermore, Hu’s performance strengthened his position before the fourth plenum of the Communist Party’s Central Committee, where Jiang hoped to promote Hu to the Central Military Commission.

*The embassy bombing and unexpected opportunities.* On 7 May 1999, during the NATO intervention in Kosovo, US bombers unleashed missiles that demolished the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, injuring staff members and killing three Xinhua journalists. Many Chinese believed that America deliberately bombed the embassy in a brutal effort to intimidate China. On 9 May, Hu Jintao appeared on Chinese national television condemning the action. He was the first Chinese official to make a public response. In a judicious mix of nationalism and restraint, Hu called “on the UN Security Council to convene an emergency meeting to discuss and condemn this barbarous act of US-led NATO.”<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile he stated that “China firmly supports and protects ... all legal protest activities,”<sup>74</sup> and he urged students and other protestors to get back to work. Hu’s televised appearance was the first time most Chinese had ever heard him speak. For Hu Jintao, the address was a political windfall that broadened his public appeal and boosted his nationalist credentials.

Shortly after the embassy bombing, Hu increased his political power

68. “Hu Jintao urges army to transfer firms to localities,” Xinhua, 26 April 1999.

69. “Hu Jintao emphasizes importance of closing PLA businesses,” Xinhua, 28 July 1998 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

70. Zheng Hongfan and Sun Jie, “Hu Jintao on transfer of army businesses,” *Renmin ribao*, Xinhua, 26 April 1999 (FBIS).

71. “Hu Jintao emphasizes importance of closing PLA businesses.”

72. “Hu Jintao addresses ASEAN leaders,” Xinhua, 14 January 1999 (FBIS).

73. “‘Full text’ of Hu Jintao’s speech on NATO attack,” Xinhua, 9 May 1999.

74. *Ibid.*

again by acquiring a key position on the Central Military Commission, China's highest military body. On 22 September 1999, Hu was appointed vice-chairman of the CMC, making him only the second civilian (after Jiang Zemin) to serve on the leading group.<sup>75</sup> The move successfully completed Jiang's previous attempts to include Hu in the CMC. It also consolidated Hu Jintao's power at the highest levels, greatly strengthened his chances to succeed Jiang Zemin and engaged him in military affairs.

*Stepping on to the world stage.* During 2001, Hu Jintao's profile on the international stage rose significantly when he was received by major foreign leaders with full honours. Hu had been active in Chinese foreign policy towards East Asia and Latin America after becoming vice-president, but his breakthrough into China's big power diplomacy came in October 2001 when he embarked on a five-nation tour of Russia and Western Europe (Britain, France, Germany and Spain). Although Hu discussed important issues when meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin (the Sino-Russian Friendship Treaty and post-Taliban Afghanistan) his other meetings were relatively light on substance. The main purpose of the trip seems to have been to raise Hu Jintao's political stature.

In early 2002, Hu had important opportunities to meet US leaders. During President Bush's February summit with Jiang Zemin in Beijing, Hu met Bush twice. On one occasion, Hu introduced President Bush at Qinghua University.<sup>76</sup> At the invitation of Vice-President Cheney, Hu visited New York, Washington, San Francisco and Honolulu in April and May 2002. This was his first trip to the United States. During Hu's carefully scripted visit, he met a cast of senior US political leaders, including President Bush, Vice-President Cheney, Secretary Powell, Secretary Rumsfeld and congressional leaders.

#### *Overview of Hu Jintao's Political Positions*

*Fighting against corruption.* Throughout much of his career, Hu Jintao has made a distinct mark on the Party's anti-corruption efforts. As early as 1993, he was highlighting the danger of corruption: "Changes in the objective environment have increased the danger that the body of our Party may become corroded. *Our Party is faced with an unprecedentedly grim task*"<sup>77</sup> (emphasis added). Since then, Hu has led several major corruption campaigns in sensitive political areas. As mentioned, he aided Jiang's campaign against Chen Xitong in Beijing. In 1997, he headed a high-level investigation of the Guangdong PLA general staff department involved in the corrupt appointment of a vice-mayor in Guangxi province.<sup>78</sup> He was also involved in investigating the 1997 smuggling case in

75. "Hu Jintao," *Renmin ribao*.

76. "Hu Jintao: China, United States have extensive common interests," *Renmin ribao*, 22 February 2002.

77. "Hu Jintao in Hunan warns of damage to Party prestige through corruption," *Hunan People's Broadcasting Station*, 4 July 1993 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

78. Willy Lam, *The Era of Jiang Zemin* (Singapore: Simon & Shuster, 1999), p.194

Zhanjiang, Guangdong.<sup>79</sup> Later, he led the mammoth effort to divest the PLA of its business ventures. Finally, Hu has conducted extensive investigations into corruption in Fujian province and he was closely involved in the massive Xiamen corruption scandal that rocked the Party in 1999. In that case, Hu and Wei Jianxing, head of the Party's Central Commission for Discipline and Inspection, led the investigation and Song Defu, a Qinghua graduate and associate of Hu's, was later named Fujian Party Secretary.

*Economic reforms: globalization or retreat?* Although Hu Jintao was linked early in his career to Hu Yaobang, one of China's boldest reformers, his economic policies remain poorly defined. Hu has never headed an economic or finance ministry, nor did he enact major economic reforms in Guizhou or Tibet. Still, Hu is a fourth-generation technocrat and has not advocated slowing reform. Like most Chinese leaders, he recognizes the power of globalization. However, Hu clearly has reservations about the process. In a talk on geopolitics on 5 November 2001 in Paris, Hu Jintao stated that "economic globalization has become an inevitable trend ... [however] developed nations benefit most from economic globalization while developing nations are facing the danger of being marginalized."<sup>80</sup>

China is beset with profound domestic social problems that, with additional World Trade Organization (WTO) pressure, threaten to increase instability. Rising unemployment, ethnic separatism, corruption and widening income gaps place enormous strains on the Party. Given his experience in poor inland provinces, Hu Jintao understands the gravity of these issues. His experience in this area stands in contrast to Jiang Zemin who served as mayor of the booming Shanghai metropolis. As Hu said, "economic development is the foundation of social stability."<sup>81</sup> Hu Jintao also supports the "western development campaign" designed to provide economic assistance to poor inland provinces, including three in which he formerly lived.

Hu's views on international economics and China's entry into the WTO are also unclear. Unlike Jiang and Zhu Rongji, Hu has not staked his political reputation on WTO membership. However, he has made broadly supportive statements and he recently urged officials to study the challenges and opportunities brought by WTO entry. As *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*) reported, "Hu stressed that entering the WTO conforms to China's basic interests and long-term benefit."<sup>82</sup> While in Washington, Hu said, "as a member of the WTO, China will honor all its commit-

79. "Central government handles Fujian smuggling case," *Tai yang pao*, 22 January 2000, p.A22 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts) and Yu Donghui, "PRC leaders urge crack down on smuggling," *Zhongguo xinwen she*, 26 March 1997.

80. "Major points of Hu Jintao's speech at French International Relations Institute in Paris," Xinhua, 5 November 2001 (World News Service).

81. "His political advantages do not lie in his young age alone."

82. "Hu Jintao on the study of international situation following WTO entry," *Renmin ribao*, 22 February 2002 (viewed on 6 April 2002 [http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200202/22/eng20020222\\_90796.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200202/22/eng20020222_90796.shtml)).

ments.”<sup>83</sup> More broadly, Hu wants to increase regional economic links, to “acquire a stronger capability to ward off financial risk, and promote jointly the economic development of Asia.”<sup>84</sup> Beyond these general leanings, Hu has not commented on specific policies, such as overseas listings of Chinese firms or the troubled banking sector.

*Domestic stability.* Hu Jintao has long stressed the Party’s involvement at the village level to strengthen political authority, to build local relations between the people and the Party, and to provide accurate information to leaders. “At present we should pay special attention to studying and solving glaring problems which affect reform, development, and stability ... First, we should truly plunge into the thick of reality, go down to the grass roots, and go among people to gather a wealth of firsthand information,” said Hu in 1994.<sup>85</sup> For Hu Jintao, “regime building” means boosting rural Party leadership and he supports democratic village-level elections.<sup>86</sup>

Regarding political reform and social stability, Hu Jintao presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, his use of military force in Tibet and his immediate endorsement of the Tiananmen crackdown suggests that he views stability – that is, no political challenges to Communist Party rule – as the paramount political goal. He also supports the ongoing campaign against the *falun gong* spiritual movement.

On the other hand, with China’s economy drifting further from its socialist moorings and the veil of political legitimacy thinning, there are hints that Hu Jintao has allowed the Central Party School to explore the issue of political reform. Under Hu’s leadership, the once reclusive school has begun teaching international politics and economics, and it has recently fostered a lively intellectual environment in which foreign scholars have lectured and the experiences of foreign political parties have been examined.<sup>87</sup> Hu’s desire to maintain the Party’s relevance may tentatively push him to return to Hu Yaobang’s commitment to political reform.

*Foreign policy: dealing with the West.* Hu Jintao had no formal diplomatic experience before rising to the highest levels of government and his world outlook remains largely unknown. He has restated China’s official position that economic globalization and political multi-polarization are irreversible trends,<sup>88</sup> and he has promoted China’s “new security

83. Hu Jintao, “Enhanced mutual understanding and trust towards a constructive and cooperative relationship between China and the United States,” presented at Council on Foreign Relations dinner, Washington, DC, 1 May 2002.

84. “Asian countries facing opportunities, challenges: Hu Jintao,” *Renmin ribao*, 24 July 2000.

85. Chen Weiwei and Zhang Sutang, “Hu Jintao on leadership thinking,” *Renmin ribao*, Xinhua 29 June 1994 (FBIS).

86. “Hu Jintao on building grassroots Party organizations,” *Renmin ribao*, 7 December 1999.

87. “China’s power shift,” *Business Week*, 25 February 2002.

88. “Asian countries facing opportunities, challenges: Hu Jintao.”

concept” offered as a theoretical roadmap to global multi-polarity.<sup>89</sup> Hu has also declared that “China’s development will pose no threat to any country. Instead, it will only contribute to peace and stability.”<sup>90</sup> Hu has travelled widely around the world, and he frequently receives foreign leaders, though few from Western capitals. He plays an influential role in formulating policy towards Japan and Korea, and he met North Korean leader Kim Jung Il during Kim’s secret visit to Beijing in May 2000.<sup>91</sup>

Regarding the United States, Hu Jintao clearly shares concerns about American hegemony and its intentions in Asia. For most of his career, Hu rarely dealt with American issues or met American officials, and he did not travel to the United States until April 2002. On a visit to Japan in 1998, his first foreign trip as vice-president, Hu criticized the revised US–Japan Defence Guidelines and reportedly hinted that they could impede further development of Sino-Japanese relations.<sup>92</sup> Speaking one month before the May 1999 embassy bombing in Belgrade, Hu criticized American and NATO’s intervention in Kosovo, stating that China felt “shocked and uneasy” by the escalating air strikes.<sup>93</sup> On the 80th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement (three days before the Belgrade embassy bombing), Hu said: “The Cold War mentality persists. Hegemonism and power politics are making new headway. The world is not peaceful. Major Western powers have not changed, and will not possibly change, their strategy of attempting to ‘Westernize’ or ‘divide’ socialist countries and developing nations.”<sup>94</sup> Clearly, Hu harbours concerns about America’s global intentions and its potential to retard China’s growth.

Notwithstanding the above concerns, Hu recognizes that America is China’s most important bilateral partner and that China must find ways to co-operate with the United States. “Developing the Sino-US relationship not only benefits peoples of China and the United States, but also enhances the entire world’s peace and stability,” Hu argued in 1998.<sup>95</sup> After Bush’s election victory in December 2000, Hu sent Vice-President-elect Dick Cheney a congratulatory letter that stated: “I hope that with the joint efforts of both China and the United States, Sino-US relations will continue to develop healthily and steadily in the new century.”<sup>96</sup> During President Bush’s talk at Qinghua University, Hu encouraged youth exchanges between the two countries and stressed China and America’s “extensive common interests.”<sup>97</sup> Hu’s daughter reportedly completed a graduate finance programme at Columbia University, and she is some-

89. *Ibid.*

90. “China’s policy on Asia: Hu Jintao,” *Renmin ribao*, 24 July 2000.

91. Eric Eckholm, “North Korean in China for 3 secret days,” *New York Times*, 2 June 2000, p.A6.

92. He Chong, “The trend of Sino-Japanese relations as seen through Hu Jintao’s Japan visit,” *Zhongguo tongxun she*, 28 April 1998 (World News Service).

93. “Hu Jintao ‘strongly urges’ NATO to stop airstrikes,” *Xinhua*, 1 April 1999.

94. “Hu Jintao commemorates May 4th Movement,” *Xinhua*, 4 May 1999.

95. He Chong, “The trend of Sino-Japanese relations.”

96. “Full text of Hu Jintao’s message to Vice-President-elect Cheney,” *Xinhua*, 14 December 2000 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

97. “Hu Jintao: China, United States have extensive common interests,” *Renmin ribao*, 22 February 2002.



thing of a window for Hu into American society.<sup>98</sup> In addition, Hu has taken important steps to improve China's understanding of the American political system by setting up his own group of vice-ministers to advise him on long-term strategies to improve relations with the United States, Congress and the American public.<sup>99</sup> In January at a Central Party School conference with American scholars, including former Ambassadors Winston Lord and Stapleton Roy, Hu Jintao stressed the importance of improving bilateral relations.<sup>100</sup>

Hu Jintao's position on Taiwan, the single largest question facing the Beijing leadership, remains poorly understood. Hu has reiterated Beijing's central line: opposition to Taiwanese independence and to further US arms sales to the island. As CMC vice-chairman and probable future general secretary, Hu will be influential in cross-straits relations. Several instances suggest that he is already playing a large role on Taiwan issues. First, Hu has indicated a willingness to adopt more flexible policies in resolving the Taiwan issue compared with the policies for the return of Hong Kong and Macau. "We can sit down and discuss any issue as long as the Taiwan authorities recognize the One-China Principle," Hu said in late 2000 at a cross-straits symposium.<sup>101</sup> Secondly, Hu was seated behind the podium when Vice-Foreign Minister Qian Qichen expressed a willingness to communicate with members of Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian's Democratic Progressive Party, a probable signal of Hu's personal support.<sup>102</sup> Lastly, while visiting Washington, DC, Hu reportedly raised Taiwan weapon sales during his meetings with Bush, Cheney and Powell, and Taiwan was a central theme in his only public speech.

#### *Conclusion: New Political Dynamics*

Despite Hu's remarkable rise, the extent of his actual political power remains unclear. Because the Chinese political system is heavily influenced by personal prestige and factional politics, it is possible that Hu's titles alone do not connote tangible power. His political base is built on limited regional experience and he relies heavily on his personnel and ideological expertise. He has twice served as provincial Party secretary, but in remote regions. Hu neither has formal military experience, nor is he identified with any successful reform policies. Some observers argue that, faced with entrenched political bosses, such as Li Peng and Zhu Rongji, Hu's power may be restrained.

On the other hand, Hu has been a Politburo Standing Committee member for nearly a decade and has been vice-president for five years.

98. Erik Eckholm, "China's man to watch steps into U.S. spotlight," *The New York Times*, 27 April 2002, p.A3.

99. "Hu Jintao sets up taskforce to oversee U.S. ties," *Hong Kong iMail*, 13 December 2001 (FBIS).

100. "Vice-President Hu Jintao meets US delegation of academics," Xinhua, 19 January 2002 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

101. "Vice President Hu Jintao on the Taiwan issue," *Renmin ribao*, 28 October 2000.

102. "Chinese leader Qian Qichen urges Taiwan to end deadlock in cross-strait ties," Xinhua, 25 January 2002 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).

He has shown remarkable skill at networking, and his patrons have included China's most powerful leaders, including Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin. He has an uncanny ability to navigate factional conflict, to work with multiple patrons and to develop personal relationships with important leaders. Some analysts note that Jiang's close aide, Zeng Qinghong, is likely to be Jiang's first choice as successor. However, Hu is a Politburo Standing Committee member and significantly outranks Zeng, an alternate Politburo Member. Proposals to promote Zeng to full Politburo Membership have been blocked, suggesting opposition to Zeng and broad support for Hu.<sup>103</sup> Notably, Hu became a powerful political figure *before* Jiang began promoting him, demonstrating the importance of Deng and Hu's other patrons. Moreover, Hu seems to have won a healthy measure of respect from Jiang, evidenced by Jiang's help boosting his prestige. Jiang, for example, allowed Hu to announce the promotion of seven new generals in June 2002.<sup>104</sup> In addition, Hu's rise to power may signal a fundamental change in China's political system: the increasing importance of administrative ability rather than military or regional ties. Hu may not need to wield tremendous personal power to exercise influence within a system that is granting more institutional power.

As a final note, unlike some predecessors, Hu Jintao will not come to power upon the death of his political patron. If Hu becomes general secretary, Jiang will still be the most powerful political leader in China. This dynamic will be the defining characteristic of Hu's initial term and China's next political era. When he becomes president or general secretary, Hu will rely to an extent on Jiang's political power to maintain control, while continuing to construct his own base. A new power axis between Hu, nominal leader, and Jiang, *de facto* political commander, may emerge and could become the single most important personal relationship in Chinese politics. Their harmony or friction could determine how the senior levels of government operate. One possibility is that Jiang will be the locus of political power and Hu will be its formal administrator. Alternatively, the dynamic could become a source for political struggle unlike any the People's Republic has ever experienced. Because of his pivotal nature, Hu Jintao requires scrutiny as his rise promises to shape the future of the Chinese political system and world affairs.

103. David Hsieh, "No Politburo seat again for Jiang's protégé," *The Straits Times*, Singapore, 27 September 2001.

104. "Seven Chinese military officers promoted to general," Xinhua, 2 June 2002 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).