

# The Dawn of a New Age China? Only Time Will Tell....

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*"Poverty is not Socialism. To be rich is glorious"*

— Deng Xiaoping, former Chairman of Communist Party of China

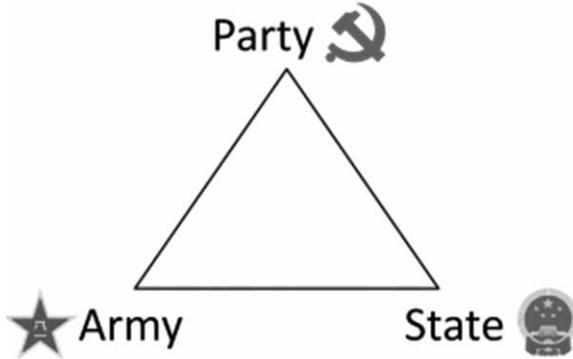
*"If GE's strategy of investment in China is wrong, it represents a loss of a billion dollars, perhaps a couple of billion dollars. If it is right, it is the future of this company for the next century."*

— Jack Welch, former Chairman and Chief Executive Officer,  
General Electric (GE)

Political transition is an integral part of any nation's government. It is a phase where the old makes way for the new. With a new set of ideologies, visions and goals, a new government can make or mar a nation's development path. There are a few nations who employ a rather unique way of transfer of power. The most unique among them is China.

The People's Republic of China (PRC), or China as it is generally known, was formally established in 1949. Although some experts term it as a multi-party state under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in a United Front, it is effectively a single party state governed by the CPC. The Chinese government mainly comprises of three bodies- The Communist party Of China (CPC), Central

People's Government (State Council) & People's Liberation Army.



## **Generations of Leaders**

Most political experts segregate the leaders of China into four generations. The first generation with Mao Zedong at the core, the second generation with Deng Xiaoping as the mainstay, the third generation with Jiang Zemin as its head and the fourth generation of leaders (who constitute the present government) with Hu Jintao at the centre. Although the economic growth of China started with Deng Xiaoping (Known for his economic reforms), all four generations have had their share of contributions in the growth story of China.

## **How did the change take place?**

The Chinese have a unique way of electing their top brass. The present officials identify the potential candidates for future leadership and groom them under their reign. They make sure that the future candidates have the required experience, qualifications and aptitude to take over the most powerful posts in the country. Over a period of time, the prepared candidates are promoted to important posts in the regime so that they can establish a power base.

“This will not only enable them to assess the candidates on a timely basis, but also change the candidate if they prove incompetent or weak”, says a leading Political Science expert at Harvard University.

## **The Who's Who of Change...Present to Future...**

“The fifth generation of leaders is educated in social science, languages, capitalism, economics, etc. Which brings about a refreshing change in the increasingly technical upper stratum of the present day government,” said Philip Kuhn, a China historian at Harvard.

“The princelings are elitists, as opposed to the populists who are in power today. So it will be interesting to see how the ideology and the basis of their government will be,” Kuhn opines.

Although the fourth generation of populists are visionaries, their vision seems to be focused only on economic development. They are not assessing social issues on a regular basis. These leaders are evading these issues and have brought about some laws where they can control the situation rather than assess it and find solutions. It is apparent that it should be taken care of soon, in the near future at least if not immediately. If the fifth generation also fails to address these issues, it is definitely going to affect the nation as a whole sooner or later. Most of the fifth generation leaders have been educated in western countries. Hence many experts hope that they will bring about a refreshing western change to the governing policies. There is no doubt that the economic and international ties will more or less remain the same and in fact improve as these leaders are groomed under the fourth generation who strongly advocated the existing principles. They have been exposed to the western society and education system and hence will be able to assess the pros and cons better than the present crop.

The Chinese state is constructed around the National People's Congress (NPC) which meets every year in March. In theory, it is basically a formal body with representatives elected by the president. They form the cabinet of ministers (the premier and several vice-premiers). Every five years the NPC elects a chairman and the only candidate is the General Secretary of the Communist party, i.e. the President. After the cabinet is chosen, the NPC officially “confirms” it. The current chairman of the NPC is Hu Jintao who is going to resign in 2012, as he cannot hold more than two consecutive five-year terms. The expectation is that Xi is going to succeed him in 2012. Meanwhile, Xi serves as the vice-president of the NPC.

China is becoming a global superpower and the world is waiting to see if the present generation of leaders will address several issues regarding society and diplomatic relations which is rampant in China. The UN has strongly opposed the social situation in China and hopes that the new generation of leaders who have western education might be inclined to make changes in the same way.

All that the experts and the lay public can do is speculate about how the government will behave and wait till the government comes to power. But it is expected to usher in radical changes which will not only improve the social position of people but also improve China's image on the global stage.



**Hu Jintao**, President, age 68, is a trained civil engineer. His main power source is the Communist Youth League (CYL). He has a reputation for being obedient, honest and inexpressive, seldom offering views in public. Hu was chosen as Jiang's successor by Deng Xiaoping, and was only unwillingly accepted by Jiang. As a result, Hu spent most of his term unseating Jiang's pupils from important positions and changing them with his own. Ever since taking over the top position, Hu's central theme has been inclusive growth, in order to control social and political agitation.



**Wen Jiabao**, Premier, also age 68, is a geologist. His influence over policy is unclear due to his dual philosophy on economic matters promoting market reform because of "serious imbalances" and at other times admiring China's "market socialism", despite his demonstrative role as China's top policymaker. However, neither Hu nor Wen are likely to stay more than a year as their terms are ending and are not likely to exert a dominant influence over the Party's future.



**Xi Jinping** is most likely to replace Hu as China's Number One leader. He was recently elevated to an important position in the military prompting speculations that he will be more or less Hu Jintao's successor. He was made one of the three vice-chairmen of the Central Military Commission (CMC). Hu, who is the current president, was also elevated to a similar position prior to his appointment as the president.

When Xi assumes the position of the head of the party, which controls the military, he will have a concurrent position as the Chairman of the CMC which will enable him to have a more direct control over the military.

The elevation of Xi, as the Vice-President of CMC was a pivotal move as far as Xi's political future is concerned. The Chairman of CMC is essentially the Commander-in-Chief of the Chinese military. Historically, this position has been held by all the ruling Presidents. This helps them to retain ultimate command over the troops, essentially making him the "Paramount Leader", i.e. having complete control to give commands.

**Xi**, age 57, is a "princeling," the child of an embossed party official. His father's ideology promotes the belief that Xi will firmly favour political and economic reform. However, some suggest that the younger Xi suffered family



humiliation during the Cultural Revolution and is “redder than red” - a devoted party loyalist. Xi is an engineer like Hu and has learned to keep his cards close to his chest. He has had a steady rise holding key provincial postings to the prosperous coastal provinces of Fujian, Zhejiang, and Shanghai. Xi’s policies, ideology and priorities largely remain a mystery to the outer world. Xi is married to Peng Liyuan - one of China’s most famous singers, making her an oddly visible First Lady. Their daughter is currently enrolled at Harvard under an alias.



**Li Keqiang**, age 55, is likely to succeed Wen as Premier, Xi’s number two. He comes from a humble background — his father was a local official in the deprived province of Anhui. He earned a law degree from Peking University and a PhD in economics. He soon rose to a leadership position in the CYL, Hu’s main power source. In 1998, Li became China’s youngest Governor in the province of Henan. His tenure there was marred by several damaging incidents, which gave him the name “bad luck.” However, with Hu’s support he championed the economic recovery of the province, giving him a promotion to Party Secretary in Liaoning, where he succeeded to revive the province’s struggling rust-belt economy. There is a strong belief that Li was Hu’s choice as successor, but that Xi won in this power struggle. However, number of successful foreign trips, cleared the path for him becoming China’s next premier.



**Wang Qishan** is currently the Vice Premier in charge of economics and finance. A history student in college, Wang—in contrast to Li—has a reputation as a real “can-do” guy. He went on to manage Beijing’s highly successful 2008 Olympics. Wang is Hu’s special envoy to the US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED), and has been commended by counterparts as “decisive and inquisitive” with “a wicked sense of humour.” Given Wang’s amazing track record, some saw him — and it is believed that he saw himself—as the next Premier. Though he probably won’t win the No two spot, it’s likely that Wang will be one of the most influential players in the new nine-man inner circle for some years to come.

**Bo Xilai** is an emerging leader in the leadership transition. He is a princeling. He graduated in history from Peking University, and is married to a well-known lawyer. In 2003, he took over as Minister of Commerce. However, his media savvy charismatic nature hasn’t gone down well with the power brokers. His



impressive antics earned him a place on the nine-man Standing Committee-He will be one of the most interesting politicians to watch out for in the next few years. The 2012-13 transition signifies the transition from the “fourth generation” to the “fiveth”. While the next President, Xi is an engineer, most of the fifth generation leaders have studied law, economics, political science or history giving them a holistic outlook. It will be interesting to see what the new generation of “princelings” will bring to Chinese politics.

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