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978-0-521-60058-3 - The New Chinese Leadership: Challenges and Opportunities after the 16th Party Congress

Edited by Yun-han Chu, Chih-cheng Lo and Ramon H. Myers

Excerpt

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## The 16th Party Congress: New Leaders, New China\*

Yun-han Chu, Chih-cheng Lo and Ramon H. Myers

The 16th Chinese Party Congress, representing the most sweeping leadership transition in the history of Communist China, marked a shift of power to the “fourth generation” of Chinese leaders, to be represented by the 59-year-old Hu Jintao. Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin respectively represented the first three generations.

The power transition is not complete because Jiang Zemin, the outgoing chief, retains his chairmanship of the Central Military Commission (CMC) and has placed his protégés in the new, nine-member Politburo’s Standing Committee. China’s new leaders hold all top offices at the national and provincial levels and over 80 per cent of the newly elected 168 seats of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) Central Committee.

Although jockeying for power by Party factions had been intense, the CCP’s leadership succession was more orderly and peaceful than in any previous Party Congress. The fourth generation of leaders, now in their late 40s and 50s, lived through the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). They hold enormous power and will steer China through its most difficult period. This unprecedented leadership turnover is bound to carry far-reaching implications for China’s ongoing economic, social and political transition as well as its engagement with the outside world.

Can this leadership and the 66 million-member CCP<sup>1</sup> realize the goals of the 16th Party Congress, which are to revitalize the CCP, modernize the country, provide a modest living standard for the great majority of the Chinese people, unify the mainland and Taiwan, protect China’s national security and elevate the nation’s international standing? Are these leaders able to promote economic development and distributive justice, reduce regional economic disparity, harness new and powerful social forces having diverse interests, implement incremental political reform, manage US–China relations, deal with the Taiwan issue, and minimize the negative effects of globalization while channelling its benefits to help China?

To answer these questions, the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, in co-operation with Taiwan’s Institute for International Policy Research, invited several dozen leading scholars to a conference at the institution in January 2003. The conference examined the backgrounds and capabilities of the new leaders and their willingness to use Jiang Zemin’s legacy to solve future problems. The Jiang era includes the

\* We thank the Institute for National Policy Research for financial sponsorship, and its chairman, Dr Hung-mao Tien, for his support and encouragement. We also thank the Hoover Institution, and in particular Dr Larry Diamond for his important role in the development of the volume.

1. CCP membership in June 2002 totalled 66 million, 5 million more than in 1997. See *The China Quarterly*, No. 172 (December 2002), p. 1110.

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14th and 15th CCP Congresses and the institutional changes that followed them. Will the little-known Hu Jintao rely on Jiang's legacy or introduce innovations of his own, as Jiang did? The chapters that follow try to answer these questions.

*China's New Generation of Leaders*

Some new political norms that owe much to Deng Xiaoping's leadership came into play at the 16th Party Congress, including that Politburo members should not serve more than two consecutive terms of five years each and not be more than 70 years old. (An important exception was former CCP secretary general Jiang Zemin, who, like Deng Xiaoping before him, chairs the CMC after giving up all Party posts. Jiang is informed of Politburo deliberations, and, with Party elders Zhu Rongji, Li Peng and others, advises the new leadership.)

The new leaders are young; except for the Politburo member Luo Gang (formerly in charge of internal security) and People's Liberation Army (PLA) general Cao Gangchuan, both born in 1937, all were born in 1940 or after. As Suisheng Zhao's chapter notes, they have little memory of the pre-1949 era and were spared the brutal leadership struggles that characterized the Party until Deng Xiaoping became the paramount leader in 1978. All the new Politburo members graduated from college, with nine graduating from China's top universities and only Luo Gan studying abroad and graduating from a university in the former Democratic People's Republic of Germany. Most trained as engineers, many at Qinghua University in Beijing. They all came from families who encouraged them to acquire a higher education and professional expertise; many of those same families during the Cultural Revolution had been accused of being "too bourgeois."

Thus, these new leaders feel that, for the CCP to win the hearts and minds of the people, China must avoid chaos and maintain social stability. Moreover, Chinese citizens must have the opportunity to enhance their "life chances."

These young leaders also believe in Deng Xiaoping's dictum that China can be saved only through reform that is compatible with Chinese culture, ideology and institutions. Just as Jiang followed in the footsteps of Deng but established his own legacy, these leaders, many of whom owe their careers to Jiang Zemin's patronage, will build on Jiang's legacy and create their own.

In his chapter Suisheng Zhao points out that the new Politburo leaders all served in high provincial or ministerial positions or both during the 1980s and 1990s (see his Tables 1 and 2), which gave them the skills to solve problems produced by the ongoing reforms. Respected by their colleagues, their official behaviour mimics that of the modest general secretary Hu Jintao, a team player and deferential to superiors. Like Hu, they loyally serve the Party and state, comfortably participating in a collegial process of consensus building using the principle of democratic centralism. In China's political life, personal networks and their institu-

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tional underpinnings are as important as the collective leadership's vision of China's future.

Gerrit W. Gong emphasizes that in the past five years these top leaders have had firsthand observation of China's changing role in the international order. Like Deng and Jiang, they believe that China must rely on diplomacy and trade, build friendly relations with other nations, and participate in international organizations to expand alliances. They have travelled widely, taking 42 foreign trips to 197 countries, including Asia and Africa, with fewer trips to South America, the Middle East and Oceania. Hu Jintao – the most widely travelled among the group – has visited 23 different countries, nearly twice as many as that of his new colleagues. Although they have not been educated abroad and are not fluent in foreign languages, they are carefully briefed about foreign visitors and well informed about significant foreign policy changes taking place in the world. Some, including Hu Jintao, have sent their children abroad to study.

The relationship of Hu with his predecessor Jiang Zemin shows that the new leaders can effectively work with their elders to realize CCP goals. Whether such a mentor relationship between Jiang and Hu is in the best interests of the Party remains to be seen, as Yu-Shan Wu notes in his chapter. Wu suggests that such a relationship can intensify the fears and prejudices shared by Party elders and produce leadership gerontocracy. In the past, Hu had been content to remain in the shadows and publicly said little until being made CCP secretary general. When he came to power Jiang deferred to Deng, kept a low profile and worked hard, and Hu has done the same while maintaining a high-quality performance and building relationships with Party, provincial and government officials. Moreover, Hu endorsed Jiang's leadership and ascended to power without threatening him.

Some China watchers hint at tensions between Hu and Jiang's trusted colleague Zeng Qinghong, but there is no reliable evidence to confirm the reports. Zeng helped Jiang design the "three represents" theory, now leads the Central Party School, and is a Standing Committee member. Hu endorsed the "three represents" theory and vowed to "unswervingly" and "persistently" carry out the policy objectives set out in the political report of the last Central Committee (Suisheng Zhao's chapter). When speaking to the Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) on 3 February 2003, Hu referred six times to the "three represents" theory, reminding his audience that corruption must be eradicated from within the CCP. So far, collegiality, not tensions, characterizes the new leadership.

David Shambaugh's chapter observes that, before the 16th Party Congress ended, Jiang and his Politburo colleagues had retired all senior officers of the PLA and installed a new team of young, professional officers. In 2000, the CCP had ordered PLA officers to give up their chairmanships of defence-related industries and ordered them to the barracks to train as an even smaller, professional military leadership. Although the government spent substantial funds to modernize the PLA,

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a policy that will continue for the foreseeable future, the spending increase of this year was below previous years. As chairman of the CMC, Jiang Zemin keeps a watchful eye on the Party's new leaders and the military establishment as well.

*The Jiang Zemin Legacy*

Lowell Dittmer's chapter points out that in 1990–91, Jiang aligned himself with the central planning team under Chen Yun, Bo Yibo and Li Xiannian, but then in 1992 supported Deng's call at the 14th Party Congress for a socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics. Jiang went on to reform the command economy, reorganizing enterprises by "grasping the large firms and relinquishing the small ones" and restructuring their friendly ministries. The state encouraged the formation of new private, public and joint venture enterprises; in 1993–94 a new foreign exchange rate was instituted and a value-added tax on enterprise production introduced. The results were stunning. By 2002, the non-public economy accounted for more than 50 per cent of industrial output and employed more than that share of the workforce. In 1999 China gained entry to the World Trade Organization.

According to Dittmer, Jiang first reduced the administrative staff in central and provincial administrations by nearly half and by 20 per cent for county and township administrative posts. He then discouraged factional struggle in the Party and government and extended civility to opposing faction leaders while encouraging them "to retire honourably without ideological recrimination if eased out of the leadership." After Deng died, Jiang continued reforming the Communist Party. He instructed the Central Party School to encourage new thinking about how to transform the CCP into a dynamic, creative political force. The school examined how political parties such as the Kuomintang and Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) were able to survive for so long. The school also studied how European social democratic parties governed and coped with opposition parties. In 2003 Mao Zedong's secretary, Li Rui, was allowed to write an essay outlining how direct elections might be designed for the CCP. The Party also encouraged research on the progress of villages holding direct elections, whether townships should have similar elections, how rural taxation had developed and the factors influencing farmers' living conditions.

CCP leaders have always referred to a "comprehensive doctrine," or *tixi*, as articulated in Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong's writings. By the late 1980s Deng Xiaoping's thought also had become a "comprehensive doctrine." Jiang Zemin hopes that his efforts to transform the CCP will place him in the pantheon of creators of a new "comprehensive doctrine."

Lewis and Xue's chapter argues that Party reforms during the 1990s divided society into winners who benefited from the reforms and losers who did not. In the last few years, the number of losers has been catching up with the numbers of winners and their living standards declining.

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Many losers – the unemployed, the aged without social welfare, and those treated unjustly by the Party and state – perceive the CCP as corrupt and blame it for the sudden increase in their numbers.

To restore the public's trust in the CCP, the Party had to clean up its act. To do that, Jiang conceived the "three represents" theory that he introduced in February 2000 during a tour of Guangdong and Shanghai cities. Just as Deng had during his 1992 tour of the south, Jiang called for new thinking in the Communist Party (Deng had urged the Party to promote a socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics). In his speeches Jiang urged the Party to use science and technology to transform Chinese society. He then called on it to admit capitalists; self-employed, financial and technical-skilled professionals; managers and technical staff of foreign-funded enterprises; and entrepreneurial-technical staff in the non-public sector. Finally, he called for innovative ideas from all segments of society to meet the challenges of the times. Jiang warned Party members that society was rapidly changing and that, if they did not champion those changes, the CCP would be left behind in the dustbin of history. New ideas must replace old ways of thinking. After the CCP Politburo affirmed Jiang's "three represents" theory, on 1 July 2001, Jiang again called for reform in a speech at the Central Party School to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Communist Party.<sup>2</sup>

According to Zheng Bijian, former executive vice-president of the Central Party School, the CCP should not become a party of all the people. He said that "only a party representing the interests of the most advanced class [the workers, redefined to include intellectuals and entrepreneurs] can reconcile divergent interests on the basis of the fundamental interest of the broad mass of the people." Zheng said that the former Soviet Union had failed to create a party of all the people: "We definitely cannot copy Western concepts and include all of the broad mass of contemporary Chinese intellectuals, including science and technology workers, cultural workers, and economic managers, in the category of the so-called 'middle class.' This denigrates, weakens, and even obliterates the working class."<sup>3</sup> In her chapter reviewing recent urban economic changes that now challenge the CCP's new leaders, Dorothy Solinger contends that if the "three represents" theory signals Party support for a new urban-elite constituency, the CCP will move in the wrong direction because it will be ignoring a growing segment of uneducated, poor and unemployed that could undermine urban social stability and de-legitimize the CCP.

After the 14th Party Congress in 1992, when the CCP began re-

2. Jiang Zemin, *Quanmian jianshe xiaokang shehui: kaichuang Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi shiye xin jumian – zai Zhongguo gongchandang di shiliu ci quanguo daibiao dahui shang de baogao* (*The Complete Construction of a Society of Modest Living Standards: New Breakthroughs for Our Task of Opening-up and Creating Socialism with Special Chinese Characteristics – A Report Given at the National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party by Jiang Zemin*) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 8 November 2002) p. 15.

3. Quoted from Joseph Fewsmith, "Rethinking the role of the CCP: explicating Jiang Zemin's Party anniversary speech," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 1 part 2, p. 5. See <http://www-hoover.Stanford.edu/publications/default.html>, Hoover Institution Publications, *China Leadership Monitor*.

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configuring the command economy, many state enterprises began closing because they could not cover costs. Unemployment increased as managers and workers lost their jobs, receiving only partial salaries as they awaited new job assignments or tried to find work. Farmers also protested against increases in rural taxes. Corruption scandals rocked several famous state banks. These developments increased society's losers, but winners also increased as the market economy continued to grow.

As complex economic expansion and contraction continued, the state tried to establish a public finance system that fairly distributed both tax burden and services to villages, townships and counties. But Jean Oi's chapter illustrates that some tax burdens declined and others unexpectedly rose. Why?

According to Oi, some villages successfully entered the market because of lower transaction costs and because they switched from low value-added to high value-added products such as manufactured goods. Villages that produced low value-added products earned little, but after officials imposed user fees and raised the land tax, their tax burden rose. Thus, some rural areas experienced economic pain but others did not because of different comparative resource advantages and different transaction costs. Moreover, where tax rules for village land were vague, local officials had strong incentives to readjust those taxes upward. Until officials can design a simple public finance system based upon clearly defined property rights and equitably tax those properties, the state will tax some villages more heavily than others, thus encouraging rural tax protests.

After the mid-1990s, unemployment soared in the urban sector because of lay-offs in manufacturing and the increasing difficulties that migrant workers have in finding jobs. Solinger's chapter cites surveys of household income and employment showing that, as the urban middle class expanded, another group emerged with low income and low employment. At the same time, public opinion polls revealed that many thought the reforms were taking place too quickly. One 1997 survey of six large cities found a larger share than in previous surveys unhappy with their jobs, incomes and degree of freedom of speech as compared to 1987. This same poll also revealed, however, that "Chinese urban residents showed not only relatively strong support for the current political system and a rising sense of nationalism, but also an unwillingness to challenge the authorities, at least not through institutional channels such as the workplace."<sup>4</sup> But that attitude might have changed in 2002, when urban disturbances erupted in many bankrupt and failing state enterprises.

As early as 1978, at the 11th Central Committee's plenum, the CCP began emphasizing the building of a peaceful international environment. When Jiang became CCP secretary general, he strongly affirmed a new foreign policy rule that China should not seek superpower status and its officials should not speak of catching up with the West (a phrase often

4. Wenfang Tang, "Political and social trends in post-Deng urban China: crisis or stability?" *The China Quarterly*, No. 168 (December 2001), p. 907.

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uttered by Japan's officials more than a decade ago). Jiang emphasized creating a stable regional and international environment for China's security. His visits to Russia, Japan, South Korea and South-East Asia, as Gerrit Gong's chapter reveals, were directed at improving relations and heading off crises before they worsened. As a result, those countries now view China as more friendly and are benefiting from China's rapid economic growth and expanding market economy.

Jiang had hoped his eight-point proposal in 1995 would facilitate a dialogue with Taiwan's leaders, but both the Lee Teng-hui and the Chen Shui-bian administrations rejected such discussions because they were based on the one-China principle. Thus, dialogue between the two sides has been frozen since 1999. Yun-han Chu's chapter points out that, after 2002, Beijing's leaders modified their stance, suggesting that each side could agree that Taiwan and the mainland are part of China, and that, with such an understanding, all topics were open for discussion. The Taiwan authorities never responded to Beijing's concession, and neither side suggested that the sovereignty of one China might be shared.

Among the topics Beijing was willing to negotiate were the "three links" (direct postal, airline and ship connections) between Taiwan and mainland China (see Yun-han Chu's chapter). Finally, in the late summer of 2002, Beijing dropped its one-China demand and invited Taiwan to discuss how to improve relations across the Taiwan Strait. Beijing's leaders also appealed to all Taiwanese (except those who had publicly championed Taiwan independence) to visit the mainland and confer with Beijing's leaders. Meanwhile, in an effort to improve Taiwan's economic growth, the Taiwan government relaxed its rules blocking Taiwan businesses from investing on the mainland.

Although the Jiang and Bush administrations got off to a bad start, when two of their aeroplanes collided over international waters near Hainan Island in early April 2000, the two states were able to arrive at a resolution (see Kenneth Lieberthal's chapter). After 11 September 2001, the two nations began sharing intelligence and working together to block the transfer of money funds to international terrorists. In late 2002 and 2003 China's leaders gently urged the United States to enter bilateral negotiations with North Korea, and even persuaded North Korea's leader Kim Jong Il to agree to send representatives to Beijing where multilateral negotiations between North Korea, China and the United States were to take place in spring 2003 to resolve the nuclear crisis that had erupted in late 2002. Lieberthal describes how, through these and other methods, the Chinese government is dedicated to shoring up its co-operation with the United States.

*New Leadership, Institutional Change and a New China?*

To summarize, the new CCP leadership that came to power at the 16th Party Congress is dedicated to strengthening and modifying the new institutions that have evolved in the past 15 years. These young, experienced and educated leaders – following in the footsteps of Deng Xiaoping

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and Jiang Zemin – will promote the market economy and reconfigure the command economy of the state bureaucracy and state enterprises. They will continue to experiment with taxation, monetary and foreign trade reforms as well as with social welfare programmes for the aged, the ill and the unemployed. As Richard Baum's chapter shows, they are willing to build upon the many political reform experiments taking place in several of Guangdong's largest counties and elsewhere. In foreign affairs, they will work with their neighbours and the United States to resolve disputes and engage in co-operative efforts for mutual interests. In particular, they will work to align the CCP with the new groups rising in the new economy.

Can China's new leaders reverse the trend of the number of losers catching up with the winners in China's economic reforms? Can they ameliorate the corruption in the CCP and build honest, effective governance. The contributors to this volume believe that the prospects for doing so in the next five to ten years are fair to good provided Party leaders hold themselves accountable for mistakes and promote incremental institutional reforms that can offer incentives for people to modify their behaviour to address their problems. Why such optimism?

First, China's new leaders seem to be addressing the widening gap between the losers and winners; within the last few months Party leader Hu Jintao conducted a televised visit to some wretchedly poor areas and expressed his Party's commitment to improving such conditions. Secondly, these leaders must be willing to admit mistakes and replace officials who are corrupt and incompetent. In spring of 2003 the CCP's top leaders finally admitted the government had badly responded to the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic and sacked the government health minister Zhang Wenkang and the mayor of Beijing, Meng Xuenong, who at first had downplayed the epidemic. But good intentions are not enough. China's leaders must not only be creative and open to new thinking but honest and admit mistakes to rectify them quickly before government is severely discredited.

The chapters that follow suggest that the exiting generation of leaders not only learned by doing and performed capably before retiring, but that the new leaders might very well do the same. Although the new leaders reject Western-style democracy, they are trying to use competitive mechanisms to solve problems and establish feedback mechanisms to re-adjust policies and rules. Opting for change or reform also means creating new rules, either formal or informal, to enhance the effectiveness of organizations and their leaders to solve their problems. It was gradual institutional reform in the CCP, as cited in many of the chapters, which created the incentives for ensuring the smooth transition to the fourth generation of Party leaders. China expert Andrew Nathan agrees, claiming that the 16th Party Congress was "the most orderly peaceful, deliberate, and rule-bound succession in the history of modern China outside of the recent institutionalization of electoral democracy in Taiwan."<sup>5</sup>

5. Andrew J. Nathan, "Authoritarian resilience," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (January 2003), p. 7.



The new leaders want experienced, qualified officials selected by merit, who will, by taking responsibility for their actions in public life, be held accountable and eradicate corruption. China's leaders also realize they must transfer more authority to lower Party and state levels, but finding loyal, capable officials to use that authority wisely is difficult. Many Chinese trust that their leaders can solve China's problems, but some intellectuals, students and workers do not agree and in 1998 tried to establish the China Democracy Party.<sup>6</sup> Predictably, they were arrested, tried and sentenced to prison, because the CCP will not tolerate any unapproved solo interventions into political life.

If the CCP intends to use force repeatedly in the future to eliminate political competition, that strategy will be counter-productive. China's leaders seem to realize that, and they are already discussing how to design electoral rules to elect their local and central government leaders. Experimenting and selecting appropriate rules, while educating Party members and citizens to adopt rule-complying norms, is the political path for China's future.

These are daunting challenges for a country with a population of more than a billion. Rick Baum's chapter suggests that the CCP is inching toward a "soft authoritarian" style that, if successful at promoting gradual institutional reform, might be able to create a "new China." Just as soft authoritarian governance characterized Taiwan under the Kuomintang for nearly four decades, China's current authoritarian government tries to change the way its people live and think to create a new China.

It will have a larger, modern market economy but still be unable to narrow the gap between rich and poor, with monopolies and segmented markets continuing to generate even more losers and winners. If the Party and state can persevere in their reforms and creatively adapt by taking advantage of new opportunities, the regime and its people might turn the corner in their titanic struggle to reduce poverty. As winners ascend to elite status, they could serve as role models for the young, making the CCP less adverse towards corruption.

This new China will be involved in international problems, especially in foreign trade. As the global economy increasingly influences who loses and who wins in China, the Party and state will need to adhere to rules to gain market access to other nations while allowing its trade partners to expand their share of the China market. If the Chinese demonstrate their competitive skills, they can balance declining market shares with expanding ones, both at home and abroad. China's goal of unifying Taiwan and the mainland will probably not be realized, but the continuation of their market integration might facilitate establishment of a co-operative framework to enhance mutual trust. In this changing new China, the tensions between losers and winners will determine the stability and efficacy of China's new path.

6. Teresa Wright, "The China Democracy Party and the politics of protest in the 1980s–1990s," *The China Quarterly*, No. 172 (December 2002), pp. 906–926.

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## Leadership Change and Chinese Political Development\*

Lowell Dittmer

**ABSTRACT** This article has three goals. The first is to characterize the nature of the current Chinese political system, culminating at the 16th Party Congress, as a combination of economic, domestic political and foreign policy reform. Economically, it represents a continuation of marketization, privatization and globalization under more centrally controlled auspices. Politically, it represents a continuation of Dengist emphases on elite civility and administrative institutionalization. And in foreign policy, it brings China to the threshold of great power status, as the old ambivalence between overthrowing the international system and assuming an important role within it nears resolution. The second purpose, viewing “Jiangism” in comparative developmental terms, conceives political development in terms of both state-building and nation-building: the greatest emphasis has been on the former. The third goal is to subject Jiangism to immanent critique by pointing out the most conspicuous emergent contradictions. These seem to include gaps between rich and poor and between east and west, a largely unsuccessful attempt to reform the nation’s industrial core and its attendant financial system, and a paradoxical inability to police the state even while increasing state capacity.

Viewed as a developmental process, the 16th Party Congress, held after a two-month delay in Beijing on 8–14 November 2002, marks essentially the efflorescence and consummation of “Jiangism,” that is of the political thinking and policy line of Jiang Zemin. Clearly Jiang’s own political power has reached unprecedented heights, coinciding paradoxically with his long anticipated “retirement.” But by Jiangism we refer not to Jiang the individual leader (who has in fact been less personally dominant than either of his two main predecessors), but to the entire Chinese reform regime or *tixi*, denoting a comprehensive doctrine that sets out clear goals for society to achieve, obstacles to be removed, and the appropriate set of institutions to lock the PRC on to a given developmental path. Just as “Maoism” has conventionally been applied to the 1948–76 period, so might “Jiangism” be coined to characterize Chinese politics from the mid-1990s to the present, acknowledging that Jiang has in fact had greater political impact on this time than anyone else.<sup>1</sup> He stepped down as general secretary at the 16th Party Congress in November 2002 and subsequently yielded the state presidency at the Tenth National

\* I wish to thank Mike Lampton, Ramon Myers, Chu Yun-han, Lo Chih-cheng and other commentators for their perceptive comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and Chung-min Tsai for his research assistance.

1. Thus many aspects of Jiang’s policy line were implemented by Zhu Rongji, for example, just as many “Maoist” policies were in fact implemented by Zhou Enlai or Liu Shaoqi. However for the purposes of this analysis such distinctions are not relevant. The “Jiang regime” can claim credit for all policies implemented under its aegis.