

# **THE GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES OF CHINESE LEADERSHIP**

Lance L. P. GORE

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## **Executive Summary**

1. Deng Xiaoping was the last top leader of the revolutionary generation in China. However, their legacy, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the political system that is built around the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), continues to provide the framework for Chinese politics.
2. More importantly, the PRC history under their stewardship provided the context in which successive generations of top leaders were socialised. Their behavioural traits, mind-set and policy and political choices reflect their formative years in the Mao era.
3. Jiang Zemin and his cohort's pre-1949 education background and their experience with capitalist industrialisation had helped to shape a regime that was ideologically less dogmatic and more open to new things. They are less nostalgic because of their collective experience in persecution during the Cultural Revolution (CR), often because of their "bourgeois" intellectual background.
4. Hu Jintao and his cohort were the first generation of Chinese leaders almost entirely educated under the PRC. They completed their formal education before the CR and spent their formative years in the "golden age" of the CCP in the 1950s. They were trained to be loyal and obedient.
5. Hu's governing style duly reflected his upbringing as a "good kid" of the Party. He is low-key and reserved; his tenure is characterised by collective leadership, cautiousness and consensus-based decision making. He relied on technocratic competence rather than persona.
6. Xi Jinping's generation is marked by the "red-second generation" coming of age. Boosted by their pedigree and China's meteoric rise, Xi's leadership is more confident. However, they suffer from defected formal education owing to CR disruption.

7. Their confidence and defected education coupled with the collective experience of the CR's lawlessness make them bolder, brasher and less predictable, as is evidenced by Xi's drastic recentralisation of power and assertive foreign policy.
8. Their red family background and the incessant Maoist indoctrination in their youth have made Maoism their subtle "second nature" even if they have rejected it at the theoretically level. Rebuilding the communist party through anti-corruption campaign, reviving the ideological faith and institutionalisation have topped Xi's political agenda so far. Xi is also much bolder in reform initiative.
9. The next generation will consist of those born in the 1960s. They went to college in the ideological turmoil of the 1980s and are expected to be less ideological. This is the generation more likely than the previous three to break new paths. It is expected that China will be able to rid of its ideological and political baggage when the post-1980s/1990s generations take over the rein.