

**CHINA MAKING PERSONNEL
PREPARATION FOR THE 20TH
PARTY CONGRESS IN 2022**

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EAI Background Brief No. 1619

Executive Summary

1. Since the beginning of 2020, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has been accelerating personnel reshuffles at the provincial/ministerial/corps level to prepare for the power transition at the 20th Party Congress in 2022 when more than half of the 25 incumbent members may leave the Politburo.
2. The provincial leadership reshuffle preceding the Party Congress may shed some light on the upcoming restructuring of the CPC politburo and other leading bodies.
3. Twenty-one out of 31 provincial party secretaries and 27 out of 31 provincial-level governors/mayors were reshuffled between January 2020 and December 2021. Most of the new appointees were born in the 1960s.
4. Ma Xingrui replaced Chen Quanguo, a Politburo member, as the Xinjiang party chief, which is seen as paving the way for promoting Ma to a Politburo member in 2022. Wang Weizhong replaced Ma as Guangdong governor, while Hu Henghua succeeded Tang Liangzhi as Chongqing mayor.
5. Since the party secretaries of Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Chongqing and Guangdong province are already Politburo members, chances of promotion for governors/mayors in these regions to the Politburo are better than their peers in other provinces.
6. Among provincial party secretaries that are not Politburo members, Ying Yong (Hubei), Zhang Qingwei (Hunan) and Lou Yangsheng (Henan) are strong candidates for the Politburo due to their party secretary experiences in two provincial regions.
7. Ma Xingrui, Zhang Qingwei, Zhang Guoqing (Liaoning) and Yuan Jiajun (Zhejiang) all rose through the aerospace industry. Yin Li (Fujian) and Shen Xiaoming (Hainan) are both highly experienced health professionals. Their promotions reflect the rising priority of industrial innovation and public health in the Xi administration.

8. Cabinet ministers normally have lesser chances of promotion to the Politburo or other state leader positions than their provincial peers. However, close connections with the top leadership or provincial party secretary experience may mitigate this setback. Nine ministers appointed between 2020 and September 2021 were born in the 1960s.
9. Ministerial-level officials working in CPC Central Committee agencies like the Central Organisation Department, Central Propaganda Department, International Liaison Department, Central Policy Research Office, United Front Work Department, General Office or even the Central Party School may also have access to national leadership positions.
10. In July and September 2021, the Central Military Commission (CMC) promoted two batches of senior military officers to the rank of general. Some of these newly promoted generals may join the elite CMC chaired by Xi in 2022.

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CHEN Gang^{*}

Rising Stars from Provincial Regions

- 1.1 Power succession is core to Chinese elite politics. The Communist Party of China (CPC) has accelerated personnel reshuffles at the provincial/ministerial/corps level since the beginning of 2020 to prepare for the power transition at the 20th Party Congress in 2022.
- 1.2 Chinese provincial leaders who are important political players that constitute the largest bloc in the CPC Central Committee form a major link through which the central leadership implements its political and socioeconomic policies. These officials are heavyweights in Chinese politics, with the primary responsibility of overseeing local economies that can dwarf those of other countries. The provincial leadership reshuffle preceding the Party Congress may shed some light on the upcoming restructuring of the CPC politburo and other leading apparatus.
- 1.3 Massive reshuffling of provincial leaders took place in 2020 and 2021. Twenty-one out of 31 provincial party secretaries and 27 out of 31 provincial-level governors/mayors were reshuffled during this period (Appendix I), with most of the new appointees born in the 1960s.
- 1.4 In December 2021, Ma Xingrui (born in 1959) replaced Chen Quanguo, a Politburo member, as the Xinjiang party chief, which could be taken as paving the way for promoting Ma to a Politburo member in 2022. Wang Weizhong replaced Ma as Guangdong governor, while Hu Henghua succeeded Tang Liangzhi as Chongqing mayor.

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1.5 Since the party secretaries of Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Chongqing and Guangdong province are already Politburo members, governors/mayors in these regions have better chances of promotion to the Politburo than their peers in other provinces (Table 1). Among the five incumbents, Gong Zheng (Shanghai) and Liao Guoxun (Tianjin) have political ties with Xi, while Chen Jining (Beijing),¹ Wang Weizhong (Guangdong) and Hu Henghua (Chongqing) are well known for their engineering backgrounds.

TABLE 1 PROVINCIAL LEADERS WHO ARE LIKELY TO JOIN THE POLITBURO IN 2022

Name	Position	Year of birth	Education and Work Experience
Ma Xingrui	Xinjiang party secretary	1959	Aerospace, Guangdong
Chen Jining	Beijing mayor	1964	Tsinghua University, Environmental Engineering
Gong Zheng	Shanghai mayor	1960	Chinese customs, Zhejiang province
Liao Guoxun	Tianjin mayor	1963	Ethnic minority, Guizhou, Zhejiang and Shanghai
Hu Henghua	Chongqing mayor	1963	Technology and engineering, Hunan, Shaanxi
Wang Weizhong	Guangdong governor	1962	Technology and engineering, Shanxi
Ying Yong	Hubei party secretary	1957	Zhejiang, Shanghai
Zhang Qingwei	Hunan party secretary	1961	Aerospace, Heilongjiang
Shen Yiqin	Guizhou party secretary	1959	Guizhou
Zhang Guoqing	Liaoning party secretary	1964	Military industry
Liu Guozhong	Shaanxi party secretary	1962	Military technology, Heilongjiang, Sichuan and Jilin
Shen Xiaoming	Hainan party secretary	1963	Health professional, Shanghai
Yuan Jiajun	Zhejiang party secretary	1962	Aerospace, Ningxia
Yin Li	Fujian party secretary	1962	Health professional, China Food and Drug Administration, Sichuan
Lou Yangsheng	Henan party secretary	1959	Zhejiang, Hainan, Hubei and Shanxi

Source: Compiled by the author based on information available at <https://macropolo.org/chinese-politics-rising-stars-provincial/?rp=e>, accessed 25 November 2021.

1.6 The younger provincial party secretary, minister and governor could be dark horses in Chinese politics, including Liaoning Party Secretary Zhang Guoqing, Shandong

¹ Chen Jining as a full member of the 19th CPC Central Committee did not attend the CPC Sixth Plenum in November 2021. It is still unclear why he was absent from such an important meeting, a possible dampener to his chance of promotion.

Party Secretary Li Ganjie (both born in 1964), Minister of Natural Resources Lu Hao (1967) and Fujian Governor Zhao Long (1967).

- 1.7 Among provincial party secretaries that are not Politburo members, Ying Yong, Zhang Qingwei and Lou Yangsheng are prospective candidates due to their valuable party secretary experiences in two provincial regions (Table 1). Ying and Lou worked under Xi when Xi was party secretary of Zhejiang province from 2002 to 2007, and both are younger than 68 in 2022, the cut-off age for new Politburo members. More importantly, Ying had been in the important position of Shanghai mayor for three years before he replaced Jiang Chaoliang as Hubei party secretary due to the latter's poor response to the COVID-19 outbreak. After the transfer, Ying successfully controlled the spread of the virus in Hubei, which gave him additional political credit. Similarly, Lou has the political advantage of assuming the post of party secretary in Shanxi and Henan, two populous provinces in central China.
- 1.8 Ma Xingrui, Zhang Qingwei, Zhang Guoqing and Yuan Jiajun all rose through the aerospace industry.² Yin Li and Shen Xiaoming are both highly experienced health professionals. Their promotions reflect the rising priority of industrial innovation and public health in the Xi administration. Of these six technocrats, Zhang Guoqing and Shen Xiaoming are the younger provincial party secretaries that may have ties to Xi. Zhang's doctoral studies at Tsinghua University overlapped with those of Xi (1998-2002) and Shen was education boss in Shanghai when Xi served as the city's party secretary (2007). Both seem well-positioned to ascend to the Politburo in 2022 or 2027.
- 1.9 Shen Yiqin, the only female and ethnic minority (Bai) provincial party secretary, may be promoted to a deputy-national-level (*fu guo ji*) position after the 20th Party Congress, or even replace Sun Chunlan as the only female Politburo member in 2022. Shen's career in Guizhou also means she has worked closely with Xi's allies like Li Zhanshu and Chen Min'er.³

² Chen Gang, "What is New for China's Technocracy in Xi Jinping's Time?" *China: An International Journal*, 18 (1), 2020, pp. 124-134.

³ Neil Thomas, "Eye on 2022: Rising Stars in the Provinces", <https://macropolo.org/chinese-politics-rising-stars-provincial/?rp=e>, accessed 25 October 2021.

- 1.10 Young provincial leaders have diversified backgrounds including working experiences in coastal areas like Zhejiang, Shanghai and Fujian, military and aerospace industry, Communist Youth League (CYL), technology and engineering sectors, as well as public health. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, two officials with public health background, namely Yin Li and Shen Xiaoming, have been promoted to become party secretary of Fujian and Hainan provinces respectively.
- 1.11 China has promoted many technocrats at the ministerial/provincial level during Xi Jinping's tenure, many of whom are from the military-related aerospace industries, electronic and environmental engineering, medical or other strategic new industries. There is a move to integrate military and civilian industries, and the emphasis on technocracy is indicative of China's ambition to seek tech supremacy and a cleaner environment. The draft outlines of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) and long-range objectives for 2035 unveiled in March 2021 reflected China's aim to consolidate its supply chains amid a push by some countries towards decoupling, and to significantly increase China's spending on research and development (R&D) to achieve self-reliance in key high-tech sectors.⁴

Frontrunners in the Ministries, CPC Central Agencies

- 2.1 Although cabinet ministers normally have lesser chances of promotion to the Politburo or other state leader positions as compared to their provincial peers, those who have close connections to the top leadership or work experience as provincial party secretaries still stand a chance to join the top echelon. Incumbent Politburo members like Liu He (former deputy minister in charge of the National Development and Reform Commission) and Yang Jiechi (former foreign minister) were cases in point for the power reshuffling at the 19th Party Congress in 2017.
- 2.2 Among the 26 ministers in the State Council, China's cabinet, most of the 11 appointed between early 2020 and September 2021 were born in the 1960s (Table

⁴ "China targets 6% growth, five-year plan for tech supremacy", <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/china-targets-6-growth-five-year-plan-for-tech-supremacy/article33997611.ece>, accessed 6 March 2021.

2). Like their colleagues in the provinces, ministers born in the 1960s have brighter prospects of promotion in 2022 than their elder peers.

TABLE 2 MINISTERS APPOINTED IN 2020 AND 2021

Position	Current Holder
Minister of Education	Huai Jinpeng (怀进鹏) (1962)
Minister of Industry and Information Technology	Xiao Yaqing (肖亚庆) (1959)
Minister in charge of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission	Chen Xiaojiang (陈小江) (1962)
Minister of Justice	Tang Yijun (唐一军) (1961)
Minister of Ecology and Environment	Huang Runqiu (黄润秋) (1963)
Minister of Water Resources	Li Guoying (李国英) (1963)
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs	Tang Renjian (唐仁健) (1962)
Minister of Commerce	Wang Wentao (王文涛) (1964)
Minister of Culture and Tourism	Hu Heping (胡和平) (1962)
Auditor-General of the National Audit Office	Hou Kai (侯凯) (1962)
Minister of Emergency Management	Huang Ming (黄明) (1957)

* Number in parentheses indicates year of birth

Source: Compiled by the author.

2.3 Lu Hao, minister of Natural Resources and former governor of Heilongjiang province, is the youngest minister in the State Council (Appendix II). He was born in 1967 and worked as first secretary of the Chinese CYL, which has served as a cradle for generations of Chinese leaders such as former CPC General Secretary Hu Yaobang and Hu Jintao. Cadres in the CYL bureaucracy are on average much younger than their peers in other government or Party departments because their work targets youth. They are usually promoted at a faster speed and their comparative advantage in age could become decisive at the Party Congress when age is an important criterion for promotion.

2.4 Proximity to Xi now accounts more for personnel shifts than factional competition. Rising stars appear to enjoy the political patronage of Xi's allies in the Politburo even though they have not worked with Xi directly. Wang Xiaohong, a long-time associate of Xi, was named as the party chief of the Ministry of Public Security in November 2021 amid an anti-corruption drive targeting the law enforcement

apparatus.⁵ Wang, 64, is now widely tipped to take over from the Minister of Public Security Zhao Kezhi, who is also a State Councillor. Both Chen Xiaojiang and Hou Kai (Table 2) proved themselves in anti-corruption agencies, working under Wang Qishan, Yang Xiaodu and Zhao Leji. Tang Renjian was twice Liu He's deputy in the general office of the Central Financial and Economic Affairs Commission. Hu Heping was a protégé of Chen Xi in the Tsinghua University.⁶

- 2.5 The promotion prospects of Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao, the second youngest minister after Lu Hao, are bright because under his care, China's foreign trade continues to grow despite the COVID-19 pandemic and US-China trade row; this is not to mention his working experience as governor of Shanghai's Huangpu district in 2007 when Xi was Shanghai party secretary.
- 2.6 Interestingly, both Lu Hao and Wang Wentao, the two youngest ministers in the State Council, had served as governor of northeast Heilongjiang province before they were transferred to Beijing. This may indicate the State Council's recent policy focus on the development of the economically backward northeast China in a 2021-25 revitalisation plan approved by the State Council in September 2021. Premier Li Keqiang was party secretary of northeast Liaoning province before becoming executive vice premier in 2008.
- 2.7 Huai Jinpeng, a software expert born in 1962, became minister of education in August 2021. A typical technocrat, Huai once served as president of Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics (Beihang University), one of the Seven Sons of National Defence,⁷ and vice-minister of Industry and Information Technology. His appointment indicates China's intention to reform its education

⁵ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3156802/chinas-ministry-public-security-gets-new-party-chief-amid>, accessed 22 November 2021.

⁶ Neil Thomas, "Eye on 2022: Rising Stars in the Provinces", <https://macropolo.org/chinese-politics-rising-stars-provincial/?rp=e>, accessed 25 October 2021.

⁷ The Seven Sons of National Defence is a Chinese collegiate grouping comprising seven public research universities which collaborate closely with the People's Liberation Army. It includes Northwestern Polytechnical University, Harbin Engineering University, Harbin Institute of Technology, Beihang University, Beijing Institute of Technology, Nanjing University of Science and Technology, and Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics.

system to attain the science and technology self-reliance goal in both the military and civilian realms.

- 2.8 Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and intensified tension with the United States, China is relying more on its indigenous innovation and other domestic capabilities. The 14th Five-Year Plan, a strategic plan for the whole government, now centres around technological innovation, economic self-reliance and a cleaner environment. China's total expenditure on R&D grew from 1.4 trillion yuan in 2015 to 2.214 trillion yuan in 2019, up 56.3%.⁸
- 2.9 Another important official who played a critical role in promoting China's industry and technology capacity is Minister of Industry and Information Technology Xiao Yaqing, who was born in 1959 and graduated from the Materials Department of Central South University. Xiao, a professorial senior engineer, has worked in the State Council since 2009, assuming important posts such as deputy secretary general of the State Council, director of the State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission and director of the State Administration for Market Regulation.
- 2.10 Ministerial-level officials working in CPC Central Committee agencies like the Central Organisation Department, Central Propaganda Department, International Liaison Department, Central Policy Research Office, United Front Work Department, General Office or even the Central Party School are also prospective candidates for national leadership positions.
- 2.11 Jiang Jinquan, the new director of the Central Policy Research Office who made his debut at a press conference for the fifth plenum in October 2020 stands a good chance of joining the Politburo or the CPC Central Secretariat. The Central Secretariat, which is mainly responsible for the routine operations of the Politburo, is empowered by the Politburo to make routine day-to-day decisions and act as a coordinator among the hierarchies of the Party, the State Council and the military.

⁸ Chen Gang, "China's Fifth Plenum 2020: Five-Year Plan And Leadership Succession Void", *EAI Background Brief*, No. 1566, East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore (12 November 2020), p. 4.

A Secretariat member can wield more power than a Politburo member who holds a mainly ceremonial role. Jiang's predecessor, Wang Huning had held the directorship of the Central Policy Research Office between 2002 and 2020, and served three paramount leaders, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping.⁹ For 18 years, Wang was chief adviser to the top leaders, and since 2017, he has been a Politburo Standing Committee member.

2.12 Other promising Party administrators include Pan Yue, deputy head of the United Front Work Department and director of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, Li Shulei, executive vice president of the Central Party School, and Meng Xiangfeng, executive deputy director of the CPC General Office. The three who were appointed in 2020 would still be younger than the mandatory retirement age of 65 in 2022.

2.13 Among the three, Meng is in an advantageous position as he is already a member of the 19th CPC Central Committee while Pan is an alternate member of the Committee and Li is still outside of it. Nevertheless, Li has his unique political capital as he was named vice president of the Central Party School in 2008, working directly under then-Central Party School President Xi Jinping. In January 2017, Li was appointed deputy secretary of the powerful Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, the CPC's anti-corruption organ. Pan, once an outspoken and articulate environmental official with princeling background, may be promoted to a higher position due to China's attention to environmental problems and climate change in Xi's era.

Military Reshuffle

3.1 In July and September 2021, Xi promoted two batches of senior military officers to the rank of general respectively. The officers promoted in September were Commander of the Western Theatre Command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Wang Haijiang, Commander of the PLA Central Theatre Command Lin Xiangyang, Commander of the PLA Navy Dong Jun, Commander of the PLA Air Force Chang Dingqiu and President of the PLA National Defence University Xu

⁹ "Jiang Jinqun – New Chief Advisor to CCP Leaders", <http://chinascope.org/archives/24946>, accessed 3 November 2020.

Xueqiang.¹⁰ In July, the promoted officers were Commander of the PLA Southern Theatre Command Wang Xiubin, Commander of the PLA's Western Theatre Command Xu Qiling, Commander of the PLA Army Liu Zhenli and Commander of the PLA Strategic Support Force Ju Qiansheng.¹¹

3.2 To many observers' surprise, Xi promoted Wang Haijiang to head the military's Western Theatre Command bordering India in September, only two months after Xi appointed Xu Qiling as Western Theatre commander in July. The Western Theatre Command leadership has undergone several changes since the retirement in December 2020 of the long-serving General Zhao Zongqi who headed the command since its inception.¹²

3.3 General Zhang Xudong took over as Commander of the Western Theatre from Zhao, but barely seven months thereafter, Zhang was replaced by General Xu, who was two months later replaced by General Wang. It remains unclear what is the current positions of both Zhang and Xu, or why they were replaced in such a short period. General Wang is now the fourth head of the western command since the China-India border clash in June 2020. He has particular expertise in the Western Theatre having earlier served as Commander of the Tibet military region, which also borders India, and as deputy commander of the southern Xinjiang military region, the military region that had directly engaged with India during the border crisis in the summer of 2020.¹³

3.4 Some of these newly promoted generals may join the elite Central Military Commission (CMC) in 2022 chaired by Xi. Air Force General Xu Qiliang and Army General Zhang Youxia, CMC's two vice-chairmen, are more than 70 years old and

¹⁰ "Xi Jinping promotes five senior military officers to rank of general", <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-09-06/Xi-Jinping-promotes-five-senior-military-officers-to-rank-of-general-1315uFoUXPq/index.html>, accessed 15 September 2021.

¹¹ "Xi promotes four military officers to rank of general", http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-07/05/c_1310044343.htm, accessed 14 September 2021.

¹² "Xi names new General to head border command, third change this year", <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/xi-names-new-general-to-head-border-command-third-change-this-year/article36331318.ece>, accessed 15 September 2021.

¹³ Ibid.

expected to retire after 2022. If past practice holds, they will be replaced by other incumbent members in the CMC, among whom Admiral Miao Hua, born in 1955, and CMC's Discipline Inspection Commissioner Zhang Shengmin, born in 1958, are strong candidates due to their age advantage.

- 3.5 The CMC is the supreme military decision-making body in charge of command and control of China's armed forces. The currently seven-man commission issues directives relating to the PLA, including senior appointments, troop deployments and arms spending.¹⁴ Almost all the members are senior generals, but the most important posts have always been held by the party's paramount leaders to ensure absolute loyalty of the armed forces.
- 3.6 Commander of the PLA Air Force Chang Dingqiu, born in 1967, is the youngest full general in the PLA. In 2014, he became the youngest officer at corps level when he was promoted to chief of staff of the air force in the former Shenyang Military Region.¹⁵ Chang went on to become the deputy commander of the newly formed South Theatre Command, making him the youngest PLA officer of his rank.
- 3.7 Along with Wang Haijiang, Liu Zhenli and other newly promoted generals, Chang is a strong contender for CMC membership in 2022. Zhong Shaojun, a long-time political aide of Xi in the PLA, is another formidable candidate for joining the CMC. Zhong, born in 1968, was one of Xi's staff in Zhejiang province, before following Xi to Shanghai and then to Beijing. A lieutenant general, Zhong currently serves as director of Xi's Office and director of the CMC General Office.

The Politburo and Its Standing Committee

- 4.1 To date, no heir apparent for CPC General Secretary Xi Jinping has been identified. Such a void has sent a signal to the outside world that Xi may seek a third term after

¹⁴ "How China is ruled", http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/in_depth/china_politics/government/html/6.stm, accessed 18 September 2021.

¹⁵ "PLA rising star tipped as future air force leader", *South China Morning Post*, 17 June 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1976523/rising-star-chinas-military-tipped-future-air-force>, accessed 29 September 2021.

2022. If the informal retirement age criterion of 68 is observed at the 20th Party Congress, with Xi an exception, Li Zhanshu and Han Zheng will leave the apex Politburo Standing Committee, while Wang Chen, Liu He, Xu Qiliang, Sun Chunlan, Yang Jiechi, Yang Xiaodu, Zhang Youxia, Chen Xi and Guo Shengkun will exit from the Politburo (Table 3).

TABLE 3 AGE AND POSITION OF POLITBURO AND ITS STANDING COMMITTEE MEMBERS (2017-2022)

Politburo Standing Committee		
Name	Age at 20th Party Congress in 2022	Position
1. Xi Jinping	69	CPC general secretary, CMC chairman, China's president
2. Li Keqiang	67	Premier
3. Li Zhanshu	72	Chief of General Office of CPC Central Committee
4. Wang Yang	67	Vice premier
5. Wang Huning	67	Chief of CPC Central Policy Research Office
6. Zhao Leji	65	Chief of CPC Central Organisation Department
7. Han Zheng	68	Shanghai party secretary
Other Politburo Members		
Name	Age	Position(s)
1. Ding Xuexiang	60	Chief of the General Office of CPC Central Committee
2. Wang Chen	71	Vice chairman of the National People's Congress
3. Cai Qi	66	Beijing party secretary
4. Liu He	70	Vice premier
5. Xu Qiliang	72	CMC vice chairman
6. Sun Chunlan	72	Vice premier
7. Li Xi	66	Party secretary of Guangdong province
8. Li Qiang	63	Party secretary of Shanghai municipality
9. Li Hongzhong	66	Party secretary of Tianjin municipality
10. Yang Jiechi	72	Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs
11. Yang Xiaodu	69	Director of the National Supervisory Commission
12. Zhang Youxia	72	CMC vice chairman
13. Chen Xi	69	Director of CPC Central Organisation Department
14. Chen Quanguo	66	Former Party secretary of Xinjiang Autonomous Region
15. Chen Min'er	62	Party secretary of Chongqing municipality
16. Hu Chunhua	59	Vice premier
17. Guo Shengkun	68	Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission
18. Huang Kunming	65	Director of CPC Central Propaganda Department

Source: Compiled by the author.

- 4.2 Nevertheless, age has never become the only criterion for China's elite politics, with other yardsticks including length of incumbency, performance and loyalty to the paramount leader at play. Li Keqiang has been China's premier for two terms and a Politburo Standing Committee member for three terms since 2007, while Wang Yang has also acted as a Politburo member for three terms since 2007. It is still unclear whether Li and Wang will serve their fourth term in the Politburo, but past experiences indicate that this is unlikely.
- 4.3 Wang Huning, a chief adviser to the three paramount leaders, namely Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping for more than three decades, may also leave the Politburo Standing Committee as he was replaced by Jiang Jinqun as director of the CPC Central Policy Research Office in 2020.¹⁶ Zhao Leji, the youngest Standing Committee member in charge of the ongoing anti-corruption campaign, may stay on in the Committee after 2022. Zhao has a strong connection to the Shaanxi province, Xi's ancestral hometown. Zhao served as Shaanxi party secretary from 2007 to 2012 before moving to Beijing to head the Central Organisation Department where he cemented his position through loyalty to Xi in his first term. Zhao played a key role in consolidating Xi's power by filling the vacancies left by a legion of cadres nabbed in the anti-corruption campaign.
- 4.4 In the Politburo, Ding Xuexiang, Chen Min'er, Hu Chunhua, Cai Qi, Li Qiang, Li Xi, Li Hongzhong, Chen Quanguo and Huang Kunming are younger than 68 at the next Party Congress, some of whom will be selected to fill the vacancies in the Standing Committee. Among them, Ding Xuexiang, Hu Chunhua and Chen Min'er, born in the 1960s, are frontrunners due to their relatively young age, while Li Qiang, Cai Qi and Huang Kunming, ex-Zhejiang officials that have forged close relationship with Xi, are also competitive. Shanghai Party Secretary Li Qiang is particularly prominent as almost all his predecessors since 1989 had made their way to the Standing Committee, with the disgraced Chen Liangyu an exception.¹⁷

¹⁶ Chen Gang, "China's Fifth Plenum 2020: Five-Year Plan And Leadership Succession Void".

¹⁷ Jiang Zemin, Zhu Rongji, Wu Bangguo, Huang Ju, Chen Liangyu, Xi Jinping, Yu Zhengsheng, Han Zheng had served as Shanghai party secretary before Li Qiang. Chen Liangyu was sentenced to 18 years in prison on corruption charges in 2008.

Succession Uncertainties

- 5.1 Amid “changes unseen in 100 years”¹⁸ as stated by Xi, CPC’s power succession and elite politics are also facing huge uncertainties ahead of the 20th Party Congress. Past experiences and existing informal rules may not necessarily guide future reshuffles. At the CPC’s fifth plenum in 2020, no major personnel decisions at the top level were announced, leaving the issue of leadership succession to Xi and Premier Li Keqiang open.
- 5.2 Traditionally, fifth plenums were used to address power succession; this unprecedented succession void sent a strong signal to the outside world that Xi could stay in power after the 20th Party Congress in 2022. Whether an exception for Xi applies to other reshuffles remain to be answered.
- 5.3 China has made surprising institutional changes for the unexpected reshuffles in the run-up to the 20th Party Congress. Since the enactment of the Organic Law of China’s National People’s Congress (NPC) in 1982, the NPC for the first time approved law amendments in 2021 that authorise its 170-people Standing Committee to appoint or remove vice premiers, state councillors and vice-chairmen of CMC during the intersessional period.¹⁹ Observers believe such law amendment paves the way for Xi loyalists to occupy key positions in the State Council and the CMC even before the Party Congress.²⁰ Dark horses could emerge during this period of massive accelerated reshuffling in provinces, ministries, central Party agencies and armed forces till the convening of the Party Congress.

¹⁸ “Xi Jinping calls for self-reliance amid change 'unseen in 100 years'”, https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/xi-jinping-calls-for-self-reliance-amid-change-unseen-in-100-years-119010100919_1.html, accessed 29 September 2021.

¹⁹ According to Articles 30 and 31 that were added to the Organic Law of the National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China (1982) in March 2021, the NPC Standing Committee can appoint or remove individuals in the State Council and CMC at the request of premier or CMC chairman during the intersessional period. The amendment also gives the NPC Standing Committee chairman new power to propose on the removal of individual State Council officials including vice premiers. Available at <https://npcobserver.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/npc-organic-law-draft-amendment.pdf>, accessed 12 March 2021.

²⁰ <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/China-People-s-Congress/China-alters-vice-premier-selection-paving-way-for-Xi-loyalists>, accessed 12 March 2021.

- 5.4 China has promoted many technocrats at the ministerial/provincial level during Xi Jinping's tenure, many of whom are from the military, aerospace, electronic and environmental engineering, medical or other strategic new industries. This new round of technocracy shows China's ambition to seek tech supremacy, a cleaner environment and integration of military and civilian industries.
- 5.5 More technocrats with engineering backgrounds are expected to join the Politburo at the 20th Party Congress with the potential of becoming successors to the top leadership in the future. These technocrats with political proximity to Xi and his top aides will have an edge over their peers in the power transition. Behind this new round of technocracy is the emergence of China's military-industrial-technological complex. Technocratic politics will consolidate the informal alliance between the nation's military apparatus and the technology industry, which will profoundly reshape the country's economy, national defence and foreign policy.

APPENDIX I LIST OF PROVINCIAL LEADERS

(Party leaders in bold letterings were appointed in 2020 and 2021)

Provincial Units	Party Secretary	Mayor/Governor
Anhui	Zheng Shanjie (郑栅洁) (1961*)	Wang Qingxian (王清宪) (1963)
Beijing	Cai Qi (蔡奇) (1955)	Chen Jining (陈吉宁) (1964)
Chongqing	Chen Min Er (陈敏尔) (1960)	Hu Henghua (胡衡华) (1963)
Fujian	Yin Li (尹力) (1962)	Zhao Long (赵龙) (1967)
Gansu	Yin Hong (尹弘) (1963)	Ren Zhenhe (任振鹤) (1964)
Guangdong	Li Xi (李希) (1956)	Wang Weizhong (王伟中) (1962)
Guangxi	Liu Ning (刘宁) (1962)	Lan Tianli (蓝天立) (1962)
Guizhou	Shen Yiqin (谌贻琴) (1959)	Li Bingjun (李炳军) (1963)
Hainan	Shen Xiaoming (沈晓明) (1963)	Feng Fei (冯飞) (1962)
Hebei	Wang Dongfeng (王东峰) (1958)	Wang Zhengpu (王正谱) (1963)
Heilongjiang	Xu Qin (许勤) (1961)	Hu Changsheng (胡昌升) (1963)
Henan	Lou Yangsheng (楼阳生) (1959)	Wang Kai (王凯) (1962)
Hubei	Ying Yong (应勇) (1957)	Wang Zhonglin (王忠林) (1962)
Hunan	Zhang Qingwei (张庆伟) (1961)	Mao Weiming (毛伟明) (1961)
Inner Mongolia	Shi Taifeng (石泰峰) (1956)	Wang Lixia (王莉霞) (1964)
Jiangsu	Wu Zhenglong (吴政隆) (1964)	Xu Kunlin (许昆林) (1965)
Jiangxi	Yi Lianhong (易炼红) (1959)	Ye Jianchun (叶建春) (1965)
Jilin	Jing Junhai (景俊海) (1960)	Han Jun (韩俊) (1963)
Liaoning	Zhang Guoqing (张国清) (1964)	Li Lecheng (李乐成) (1965)
Ningxia	Chen Run'er (陈润儿) (1957)	Xian Hui (咸辉) (1958)
Qinghai	Wang Jianjun (王建军) (1958)	Xin Changxing (信长星) (1963)
Shaanxi (陕西)	Liu Guozhong (刘国中) (1962)	Zhao Yide (赵一德) (1965)
Shanxi (山西)	Lin Wu (林武) (1962)	Lan Fo'an (蓝佛安) (1962)
Shandong	Li Ganjie (李干杰) (1964)	Zhou Naixiang (周乃翔) (1961)
Shanghai	Li Qiang (李强) (1959)	Gong Zheng (龚正) (1960)
Sichuan	Peng Qinghua (彭清华) (1957)	Huang Qiang (黄强) (1963)
Tianjin	Li Hongzhong (李鸿忠) (1956)	Liao Guoxun (廖国勋) (1963)
Tibet	Wang Junzheng (王君正) (1963)	Che Dalha (齐扎拉) (1958)
Xinjiang	Ma Xingrui (马兴瑞) (1959)	Shohrat Zakir (雪克来提·扎克尔) (1953)
Yunnan	Wang Ning (王宁) (1961)	Wang Yubo (王予波) (1963)
Zhejiang	Yuan Jiajun (袁家军) (1962)	Wang Hao (王浩) (1963)

* Number in parentheses indicates year of birth.

Source: Compiled by the author.

APPENDIX II LIST OF MINISTERS IN THE STATE COUNCIL

(Party leaders in bold letterings were appointed in 2020 and 2021)

Position	Current Holder
Minister of Foreign Affairs	Wang Yi (王毅) (1953*)
Minister of National Defence	Wei Fenghe (魏凤和) (1954)
Minister in charge of the National Development and Reform Commission	He Lifeng (何立峰) (1955)
Minister of Education	Huai Jinpeng (怀进鹏) (1962)
Minister of Science and Technology	Wang Zhigang (王志刚) (1957)
Minister of Industry and Information Technology	Xiao Yaqing (肖亚庆) (1959)
Minister in charge of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission	Chen Xiaojiang (陈小江) (1962)
Minister of Public Security	Zhao Kezhi (赵克志) (1953)
Minister of State Security	Chen Wenqing (陈文清) (1960)
Minister of Civil Affairs	Li Jiheng (李纪恒) (1957)
Minister of Justice	Tang Yijun (唐一军) (1961)
Minister of Finance	Liu Kun (刘昆) (1956)
Minister of Human Resources and Social Security	Zhang Jinan (张纪南) (1957)
Minister of Ecology and Environment	Huang Runqiu (黄润秋) (1963)
Minister of Natural Resources	Lu Hao (陆昊) (1967)
Minister of Housing and Urban-rural Construction	Wang Menghui (王蒙徽) (1960)
Minister of Transport	Li Xiaopeng (李小鹏) (1959)
Minister of Water Resources	Li Guoying (李国英) (1963)
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs	Tang Renjian (唐仁健) (1962)
Minister of Commerce	Wang Wentao (王文涛) (1964)
Minister of Culture and Tourism	Hu Heping (胡和平) (1962)
National Health Commission	Ma Xiaowei (马晓伟) (1959)
Governor of the People's Bank of China	Yi Gang (易纲) (1958)
Auditor-General of the National Audit Office	Hou Kai (侯凯) (1962)
Minister of Veterans Affairs	Sun Shaopin (孙绍聘) (1960)
Minister of Emergency Management	Huang Ming (黄明) (1957)

* Number in parentheses indicates year of birth.

Source: Compiled by the author.