

On Hu Jintao

People should have reason to believe that the 13 years of PRC under the senile Deng Xiaoping or his shadow after the Tiananmen Incident (1989-2002) are actually an unexpected accident, a transitional period, a deviation from the normal course; and Mr. Hu Jintao, who successfully took the position of Secretary-general in the past 16th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Conference in November 2002, is challenged with a new China era toward economic prosperity as well as political democracy.

Although Hu did cautiously show his political orientation close to his mentor Hu Yaobang, such as when he met the exiling “rightist” Ms. Lin Xiling during his France visit, he did not speak in his own language, even in the 16th Conference. In December 2002, Hu visited Xipobo, a village as the last CCP countryside headquarters before moving into Beijing. The People’s Daily published a picture of Hu visiting an unprivileged senior CCP member in the village. The picture per se is not impressive, and I would like to place Hu’s position lower than the senior comrade. I remember seeing an impressive published picture of Hu Yaobang sitting at the end of a row when he was the CCP Secretary-general.

Then, unexpectedly, after one month, in the beginning of the new year of 2003, the People’s Daily published a relatively long speech of Hu Jintao at Xipobo. Understandably, this published speech was written after Hu’s Xipobo visit. This is the first politically significant speech of Hu in his own language. Not only the contents but also the style are different from what we have heard in the Chinese political media in these 13 years. This speech tries to address to the audience beyond (and below) the tiny ruling circle, and places Hu himself to the position of Mao Zedong preparing to enter Beijing. Here Hu shows that he is willing to take the position of CCP (and in two months, PRC)’s head as an exam in front of the Master (the Chinese people). Although there are some meaningless words reflecting current Zhongnanhai’s weather, this speech does send out a fresh message of Hu’s characteristic seeking for a plain, honest political style. Apparently, Hu understands well that it was the Chinese people’s trust which helped the CCP to take power and the current CCP has lost people’s trust. Hu has to, and wants to take back the trust. This is beyond the expectation from his Waterpower Engineering background. We should send warm applaud to our true outstanding alumnus.

Although Zhu Rongji’s State Council was (inadequately) called “man qing/tsing (all Tsinghua) government”, Zhu Rongji becomes the weakest Prime Minister in the PRC history. Listed number 3 in the CCP ranking, Zhu never had the power beyond China’s economy. Without the power and ability to handle military and foreign affairs, Zhu even could not control some ministries traditionally under Tsinghua’s domination (such as the Education Ministry). Now, the CCP (and in two months, the PRC) under Hu Jintao, Wu Bangguo (CCP ranking number 2), Huang Ju (number 6), Wu Guanzheng (number 7) and other Tsinghua alumni enters a “Tsinghua era”. This is a natural conclusion of the PRC political logic, because, after all, only engineering is the real, hard thing to develop China. When I attended our 1985 graduation meeting for CCP members (I was counted as a candidate member then), the party secretary encouraged us: “Our Tsinghua graduates should be active in our country’s all important positions!”

I do, however, regret that other outstanding alumni are excluded from the current PRC ruling circle, or are deprived even from the PRC citizenship. For example, Wan Runnan

and Lin Yanzhi were both Tsinghua's Student Association president and they are both younger than Hu Jintao. The "rightist" Wan made a politically wrong decision to flee out of China in the Tiananmen Incident, he lost his battle field and now is forced to live a "retired" life; the "leftist" Lin made a politically wrong decision to take Beijing University's Party Secretary position after the Tiananmen Incident and later was expelled out of Beijing. It is now Hu Jintao's task to make China a more politically tolerant and democratic society so his politically dissident alumni could freely return to their birth places or political/business fields.

Unlike his predecessor and Li Peng, whose appointments to the highest CCP/PRC positions caused political uncertainty, Hu Jintao's current position is challenged only from himself, at least at this stage. However, unlike his predecessor, China in the coming years cannot avoid political democratization to maintain economic growth. In almost every field (especially in the lost fields of foreign affairs and Taiwan problem), Hu needs help desperately, especially from below. Let's extend our hands to his leadership.

Sure, there is still a final step for Hu to forward his complete leadership. When the Roman were asked whom to support: the powerful yet senescent Sulla or the younger yet ambitious Pompey, they answered: our Roman worship rising sun!

Jing Zhao
Tsinghua Physics 1980-85
US-Japan-China Comparative Policy Research Institute, San Jose, USA
<http://cpri.tripod.com>
January 2003

Reader Responses

[1]

What you said about Hu is highly informative and I wish you would submit it for airing at CCF for nationwide circulation. It would even be better if you could also submit the Chinese version to the local Chinese newspapers.
Lester Lee

[2]

Thanks for posting Mr. Zhao's "On Hu Jintao" which is very enlightening. His "Tsinghua chauvinism" is in full display here which says much about his idea of democracy and his plea to Hu for tolerance and democratization. What about those capable graduates from such outstanding schools as Beida, Nankai, Zhongda, and others? Then, he goes on to ask him to let "his political dissident alumni (could) freely return to their birthplaces or political/business fields." How about the dissidents from other schools?

I mention Beida and Nankai because I happen to come from Lianda, 1937-41 and walked all the way from Changsha to Kunming for more than two months from February to April in 1938.

While I have some empathy for the dissidents, I have little pity for them, especially those who are now holding American passports but still active in peddling democracy back in China. They may be US agents. Anyway, from what I have learned for nearly half a century in this great country, those dissidents are pretty naive and ignorant about the basic assumptions or requirements for a democracy, thinking that China would become a great nation in no time as soon as she adopts it. How long has India been a democracy? How much better is Russia today after ten years of democratization?

Or rather how much more advanced is the American democracy, considering that its Senate is 98 percent white and its House 87 percent while the white population is about 71 to 72 percent. It has been projected that by the end of this century the white would become a minority, roughly 30 to 40 percent. Still a democracy then?

No, "China in the coming years cannot avoid political democratization" with which I agree, even though having nothing to do with economic growth. No country can avoid governance "for the people, by the people and of the people" in the world of the future. But democracy is NOT one size that fits all! Each nation must first study its own history, heritage, tradition, literacy, resources and other factors and then come up with a blueprint for democratization. This is what the Chinese-American alumni of Tsinghua, Beida, Nankai and other schools ought to do. For example, Dr. Sun Yat-sen's "Five-Power Constitution" idea ought to be considered. By the way, with some stretch of one's imagination, it may be said that China has always had a government "of the people, by the people and for the people" ever since the abolishment of feudalism by the Qing Dynasty.

How has the American system worked? I would recommend Prof. Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States."

Richard Low