

Critical Issues Confronting China Series featuring Cheng Li –
Forecasting Personnel Changes at the 20th Party Congress, December 8,
2021

– Hello everyone. And welcome to today's lecture. We will get started momentarily after we give another minute or so for people to log on. We thank you very much for joining us.

– Good afternoon. Welcome to the last seminar of the critical issue for contemporary Chinese studies. For contemporary China, sorry. Today. We're very fortunate to have professor Cheng Li from Brookings Institute, Institution to talk to us about leadership lineup for the 20th Party Congress, which is a topic that is of interest for everyone, I can say. And we are equally honored to have professor Liz Perry to chair and moderate this session. Liz doesn't need introduction. And so, over to you, Liz.

– Thank you very much, Winnie. It's a real pleasure and a real privilege to help to host this session today for my colleague and friend Cheng Li, fellow political scientist of China. Cheng, as many of you know, was raised in Shanghai, but came to this country in the mid 19 80's, studied Asian studies at the University of California at Berkeley, and then went on to Princeton to earn his PhD in politics. He is in my view, this country's premier Pekingologist, and has written a number of extremely informative and often very prescient works about Chinese elite politics. But he's not simply a specialist on elite politics. He's also written some wonderful monographs and articles on ordinary Chinese society. When Cheng returned to China after a number of years in the United States, he wrote a terrific book called Rediscovering China. A very heartwarming book filled with extremely informative anecdotes about his interactions with Chinese in all different walks of life. And then most recently, in this past year, he's written another terrific book about Chinese society entitled Middle Class Shanghai, which is filled not only with fascinating political information about the city of Shanghai and its relationship to elite politics, but also fascinating information about higher education in Shanghai, and perhaps most notable, a great deal of information about avant-garde in contemporary Shanghai. So I also recommend to you Cheng's latest big book, which is intended as a means of improving Sino-American communication by talking about ways in which middle class people in China's most cosmopolitan city share a lot in common with people in this country. Today, as professor Yip mentioned, Dr. Lee is gonna talk to us about personnel changes that he anticipates at the upcoming 20th Party Congress next year. Before I turn it over to Cheng, let me also note that the audience is welcome at any time to submit questions through the Q and A function at the bottom of your screen. We probably won't have a chance to get to all of the questions, but I will attempt to get to as many as possible. And so feel free, at any point when Dr. Li is speaking, to submit your questions, and I may not pose them in precisely the way in which you

wrote them down, but I'll do my best to be faithful to the spirit of the questions. So without any further hesitation, let me turn this over to Cheng Li, to talk to us about the upcoming 20th Party Congress.

- Thanks Liz for your very generous introduction. And also thanks for Winnie for your kind invitation. First, I would like to applaud the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies and Harvard University Asian Center for your longstanding renowned efforts to promote interdisciplinary area studies and to advance international understanding. For the serious on critical issues confronting China, you are also providing a great service for both the scholarly and the public policy communities with your distinct emphasis on comprehensive analysis of China's domestic development and challenges. I'm humbled and honored to have a conversation with you, Liz, a fellow Shanghainese whose scholarship has long been an inspiration for me. I truly look forward to answering questions from you and your distinguished audience. In the next 30 to 40 minutes, I will share with you my analysis and forecast of the personnel change or changes at the 20th Party Congress, which will be held next fall. So this is the topic. I will cover three issues. One is, as Liz said, the Pekingology and its capacity and its challenges in the new environment. Then I will talk about the focus on Xi Jinping and talk about his campaigns over the past nine years, and also the changes under his leadership. Then thirdly, I will talk about the rising stars, especially after the 20th Party Congress, we already can see some of the candidates and their clusters, and their characteristics. So I used six C words to organize my presentation. Now, first, we should, I wanted to explain, I think most of you probably will agree with me the nature of the Chinese political system. It's the Leninist Party-State, which means that the party monopolize the power. That's another secret. This is actually endorsed by the both party constitution and the PRC constitution. And the party control over the army, personnel, media, legal system, and even youths. So this is certainly reflect the Chinese political system, also entire nature of that system. So elite politics as often being said is "the only game in town". And also Xi Jinping himself actually recently said "The key to the great rejuvenation of Chinese nation lies in the party". And he talk about importance of a small number of key officials in his term. This is called in Chinese "guang jian shao shu". It's extremely important, from his perspective. Now, let me very quickly mention about the Chinese political, Chinese organizational, you know, chart of the party. You know, every five years they will have National Party Congress. In that Congress, they will designate two committee, or one committee, one commission. The most important one is Central Committee. The other one is dealing with the corruption and discipline. And the Central Committee, will choose directly, General Secretary, Politburo Standing Committee and the Politburo. And the Politburo Standing Committee and Politburo will choose Secretary. Now also the Central Committee will also select the Central Military

Commission. Now, for the last Party Congress, which was held, you know, in 2017, you see, this is look at the composition. At that time, four years ago, it's 89 million of Communist Party Members. Now actually Chinese, just in June, later June, they announced the new number is 95 million. Most new recruits are college students and young people. Now, also the Party Congress has a delegate, which only met once in these five years. And they also announced in the upcoming Party Congress, they will select 2,300. 20 more than the last Party Congress in terms of delegates. Then delegates will, in Chinese term, elect or vote. But some of the, you know, top leaders of course, is already selected by, you know, by "bei dai he" meeting or other meetings by the departing Politburo standing committee. They will select the Central Committee Members, including 204, full members and 172, that was the last Party Congress. Altogether, three 376 members. These are very, very important political leaders. They are governors, party secretaries, ministers, executive vice minister, military leaders, top elites of the top, you know, companies and etcetera. Then 25 of the Politburo members will be from that Central Committee. The most important leadership body of course, is some member of Politburo Standing Committee, then General Secretary, Xi Jinping. So that's the, the background. Now we know there's a lot of discussion in China and outside China. The perception of the Chinese leadership, especially those commonly held in the west, such as being rigid, opaque, stagnant, ineffective, unpopular, and the winners-take-all. All have some truth, but it is also important for student of China to recognize that some, or even all of this, this conventional wisdom, should be subject to more critical, more balanced, and more objective analysis. Otherwise, we really cannot interpret some other phenomenon in China. Now, for example, my research on the subject shows that the Chinese elite politics has not been as opaque as many have assumed. Now this is the, the, the, the page actually was posted two weeks before the last Party Congress. I made a prediction about the, the 12 candidates for the Politburo Standing Committee. This is two weeks before. So, after they announce, then I added this check. So all this nine on my list, so not too bad. And others are also in the Politburo. Now, but actually one year ago, I gave a talk at the UBC British Columbia, University of British Columbia, and also later at Yale and some other universities, I predicted these are the rising stars that were occupy the seats in Politburo Standing Committee and Politburo, Xi Jinping's protege. And so particularly, of course, all of them are very, very powerful now. Particularly we, at that time, we did not know if there will be five members of Politburo Standing Committee, or seven, or nine. And, but I said, if it's five, will be the top five, this top one to five, if it's seven will be the top seven in this list, if nine will be these nine people. But of course later on, we do know that the top nine people which replaced the previous one is exactly the top seven I predicted a year earlier in, you know, October, 2016. Now, actually these two, early two photos were sent by my friend, professor Yves Tiberghien. I do not know how to pronounce his French name. He has a beautiful Chinese name, . I believe that he probably is also

watching, is watching. He told me about this webinar. So which means that the, the leadership, despite certain degree of opaque nature, we still can predict, we still can analyze. It's not by the internal sources or whatever, that someone, but based on the trajectory and etcetera. Now, even the 18th Party Congress, I wrote a article, predicted these seven people, actually got most of them. Six of them are correct. The one person I got mistake is Li Rencao. I predicted he will be the Politburo Standing Committee, but actually he end up only in the Politburo. The person replacing him is using Yu Zhensheng from Shanghai. So, so these are the things I just want to make, make a point, not so much that how good I, I, you know, I was, but rather, if you really follow Chinese Parties very, very closely, you will get a lot of information. You cannot be 100% correct, but largely you can foresee some of the, you know, leadership line up. Now also my book, this is a book published almost five years ago. It's a long book, 500 pages, 84 tables, and the charts, 800 footnotes, and 200 Chinese terms. And also, there's an index 600 Chinese leaders is in the index. Now I mentioned this because this book provided my methodology. How could I found that, you know, made this kind of prediction and also definition of factions and various terms, and also detailed sources. These all can be found in this book published five years ago. Now, of course, that I also follow very quickly about some of the norms and rules that even apply to the 19th Party Congress before Xi Jinping's decision to abort the term limits. So these are the norm rules, you know, started by Deng Xiaoping in the later years of Deng Xiaoping very much implemented in both Jiang Zemin era and the Hu Jintao era. When its age limits, which means that the, for the 19th Party Congress, those born before 19 50 were disqualified from membership on the 19th Party Congress. There's no exception. You know, Wang Qishan was born 1948, so he could not be Central Committee. So eventually he end up as Vice President of PRC without Central Committee membership. Now, also that, so really it's applied also for the previous two Party Congress, for example, for 18th Party Congress, the year was 19 40. Then for the, the, the later the Party Congress, I believe that if we follow that line in the 20th Party Congress, will be anyone born 1955 as the cutting age, but this will not stand, because as we know, Xi Jinping will for sure stay on. That he was born 1953. Now the interesting question is how many exceptions will be, and currently we still Chinese leadership change in the next provincial level. I will mention, still follow that. So that's very, very important indication, but also term limits. I think that also largely apply or mostly 99% apply in terms of five. I mean, no more than five, I mean two five year terms in the same position and the three five year terms at the same level and of the leadership. So actually now also will be exception, that Xi Jinping will start his third term in the party because he, he already got the, you know, kind of authorization that he could be the Chairman or the President of PRC for the third term. So that also will be change, but how much change. But currently, if you look Provincial leaders, municipal leaders, and military leaders, they all follow that, the current, you know, 400, 500 I closely

monitor. And most of them actually, it's only in their first term. And no one, violated that one, you know, except maybe one or two minority leaders in the provincials. So other 500 leaders all follow that. There's also the regional bureaucratic representation. During the Party Congress, before the Party Congress actually, and during, that each province has two full membership seats with the exception of Xinjiang and Tibet, they can have three or four seats. Now, of course, after Party Congress, these people, these leaders will be reshuffling. There could be change, could be three or could be one, or could be zero, but during and just a few months or half year before the Party Congress. I mean, each province can only present two seats. And the military also had the same number. If we look at the past few Party Congress. You know, 66, including 41 full members, 25 alternates. So this kind of norm and routines it's largely incremented. Now party also has limited elections, particularly from the delegates elected for Central Committee Members, full members and alternates. So 8% of alternates eliminated, and about 10% of the, the full members eliminated. Actually those eliminated, including minister of the water resources, Chen Lei, present of the CASS, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Wang Weiguang, and the commander of Beijing military region, later changed to the Commander of the Northern Theater commander, Song Puxuan. So that's actually quite prominent people, but they were de seated because the limited election, so-called more candidates. Now, this is the age pie of the current 376 members, including full members, and alternates. As I said, no exception, all born after 1950. A majority of them were born in the 19 50s and 19 60s. Only two members, 1% were born 19 70s. So the age plays such an important role in that pie, in that Chinese leadership composition. And also that I just finished a study. This is also based on my previous study, located the Provincial Chief, namely Provincial Party Secretaries, also like a top four cities, Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Chongqing. Municipal party secretaries, and the governors and the city mayors. Altogether 62 people. These are very, very important leadership. But you look the 2021. I mean, I actually just had the number. It's quite astonishing. 17 out of 27 governors, provincial governors, about 63% were appointed this year, this year. So their average tenure is only less than a year, and Party Secretary a little bit longer, but still just a one year and a six. So it's a very quick reshuffling. So you can expect almost all of these people, you know, with except a couple of them probably will be seated in the, in the election. Most of them will be Central Committee, the new blood in the next Central Committee. Now, this is the last Party Congress. Yellow color are the new members. Blue color are the returning members. You look at these six very important leadership bodies. This is based on my database. Most of them are new members. The Central Committee, 73%, the Central military- Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission, 93%. The seven member of Secretariat, all of them, you know, did not serve in the previous one. And also the Politburo, 60% Politburo Standing Committee, five out of seven. The military is a little bit less, only 43%. But if you look at the, these are the military, it's really the

top seven people, the com the Chairman, Vice Chairman, and the members of Central Military Commission. But you look at the military members in the Central Committee, 100% alternate members are first timers, the full members, and also included some of the six of them. Few of them promoted by previous party alternates, 85%. So altogether it's 91% of military members. These are the most senior military officers, are first timers. This is even more so than during a cultural revolution like Lin Biao incident and etcetera then reshuffling. It's a very, very big, and most of them are the young guards. I mean, of Xi Jinping directly promoted. Now, of course, all these things, some will continue. Some will change, because the rule norm and the rule, some of them already ended, will change during the Xi Jinping era over the past the nine years. Certainly the 9, 20 18, the decision to abolish the presidential term limits will have effect on both the terms of the party leadership and also the age requirements as mentioned earlier. Now, also previously they maintain some factional balance or coalition balance, but this also already changed in the 18th and the 19th Party Congress. That explains Xi Jinping's consolidation of power. I think that the next one also will be dominated by Xi Jinping's proteges, but also previously we have the Chinese system has the so called succession norm, and someone called the grandpa decision to like Deng Xiaoping promote Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin promoted Xi Jinping very much like a grandpa, led them to serve at the Politburo Standing Committee for five years or 10 years as a kind of successor in training. Since last Party Congress 19, we did not see any indication for successor for the next generation, so called sixth generation. So we don't see that norm will continue. And also previously, especially under Hu Jintao, General Secretary is considered as the first among equals, in Hu Jintao's term "Ban Zhao" like a monitor. But now that term is "Zhao" Xi Jinping is way above the other six member of the Politburo Standing Committee. And also these six members of the Standing Committee need to have an annual debriefing report and Xi Jinping will comment on their performance. So the relationship profoundly changed over the past few years. Now, this is, I mention about the factional balance or coalition balance. It's really, it's not like before, and I do not want to go through earlier because you can look at the, the 10 years ago, it's a different picture, right? But 18th party Congress, 19th Party Congress, all change. And you can look at Xi Jinping's Proteges, this is only part of them, not the four in the Politburo Standing Committee and Politburo, largely based on his, you know, strong ties in the local, the service in the, in these localities. Now I do not want to go details. Now, what can we expect? What do we know? Or we do not know at this point. So I put the two columns, the left is expected. I think it's almost for sure, a third term and a further power consolidation for Xi Jinping. And also it's, it's almost for sure, sixth generation leaders will enter the Politburo Standing Committee. How many we do not know. My prediction were somewhere between three to four. And so sixth generation also included, and were born 1959, because this is one year difference. Sometimes the Chinese usually use as the exception and actually the

recent provincial leadership, changes, a lot of them was born 1969, you know, become provincial senior leaders. Now also first timers will likely constitute half of the new Politburo. These 25 people, half of them, or more than half of them, will be first timers. And also, I believe a few exceptions for age will likely be made for both retirement. The person's supposed to retire, but they will get exceptions stay on. And those should be reappointed because the age term age is qualified will not be reappointed. And also, the turnover rate on the Central Committee will remain high, but a little bit lower than the previous Central Committee in the 19th Party Congress. It's really extraordinarily high, but the next one will be little bit less. Now, the next one is unclear for now. Any indication about the possible successor, unlikely will be identified, but I'm not 100% sure, that's why I put that unclear and who will be in and out of the Politburo Standing Committee? A lot of question mark. Li Keqiang, almost for sure will not be the third term Premier because still, term limits, two term limits apply for Premier. So who will be the next Premier? That's a big question. Li Keqiang may stay on as a Politburo Standing Committee member. If so, he probably will become the Chairman of National People's Congress, but we still do not know whether he will retire or not. Who will be the next PRC Vice President? It's almost for sure, Wang Qishan will step down. Who will constitute the top team for financial and the economic, foreign affairs, and the military? Actually, by the way, these three terms, actually three teams, as I will share, most of the top people already up to age, they supposed to retire, but again, one or two could be exception to stay on. Who will be the female and ethnic minority members of the Politburo? I mean, we heard that actually the recent announcement that they would talk about promote more female and ethnic minority, but then looking at my data pool, not so many candidates in this regard. Now, in terms of Central Committee. My prediction is, will be somewhere between 65 to 68% will be new members. So will be still very high, but it will be a little bit low than the last one. Now also I do need to mention this figures, these numbers, including those from alternate promoted to full members I also consider them as new. But if we like my friend, Joseph, Joe F. Smith always said that we should delete the, those founder alternate member to full member. Now he had to a good point, but if do so, still will be just a 10% or 12 between 10 to 12% and less, so still significant. If not be 75% still will be 63%. If not, this time will not be 68% will be probably 65% also, you know, or, or 55% or so. It's still very significant, a very high leadership turnover. Now, why I could say that. Because my database already show 46% of them, 173, the current Central Committee Member, 19th Central Committee Members already retired to the, to less important position to the symbolic position, ceremonial position. six 46%, two of, four of them die. Two of them purged. So this is already, I mean 47, 48%. So you plus those who still do not know, and some of them will be also will retire. So that's where I got my number. So these are not secure, just a guess, a lot of data supporting that. Now, interesting things. The current seven member of the Politburo

Standing Committee, you ask me who will stay, who will retire? Of course, one person for sure will stay. Is Xi Jinping. I actually say only one person will for sure retire will be currently number three person Li Zhanshu. But also interestingly, he could succeed Wang Qishan become the Vice Chairman of the PRC. Other five, to be honest, I don't know. I don't, I don't think at this point, anyone knows. And of course, Zhao Leji, may more likely because this is younger, but still do not know. My view is, three or maybe even more of them will retire. But the question is, we just do not know who. That's the challenge. Now, who will be the next premier? I put four top candidate, Han Zheng and Liu He, both are current Vice Premier. Han Zheng is exactly Vice Premier into more age. They are, you know, not born ninety, fifty five or younger. But I think for the continuity of the financial economic stability, and the continuity and stability for both domestic, you know, reason and for international reason, I think that one of them probably will stay on. Again, this is a guess. But at the same time, two other leading candidates from younger generation Li Qiang and Hu Chunha currently already are Vice Premier, the only Vice Premier is born in 1960s, or someone else, surprise. So these are the top candidates. It's very interesting to see who will be, right. Now, but the, just the last Liang Hui in March, they did a very interesting decision to allow the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress to appoint in their quarterly meeting, or bi-monthly meeting, appoint someone to be Vice Premier. You do not need to go to that every March. So this certainly good news for those, some of the people who currently not Vice Premier, maybe promoted as Vice Premier for a few months, then become Premier, because previous norms is all Vice premiers, all the premiers previously served as vice premier, except Zhou Enlai, the first premier. Now this is how I mentioned earlier. The three important teams, you look at their age, they're all born before 1955, except Li Keqiang has to step down because term limits. So my view is probably one or two of them will be exception, probably one, but if that's the case will be financial economic team. And I think all top three military officers will, will retire. There are a lot of people already line up to succeed them. Now also the challenge, as we know, there's some incidents in the past couple of years, it's quite astonishing. You know, this is a political season. Chinese said , there are some of the events, purges or arrests related with elite politics infighting. That's not a secret. Now of course, I do not want to say that there will be like 10 years ago, 10 years ago, it's different in unique period. You had Bo Xilai, Ling Jihua, Zhou Yongkang, many others. I don't think you were going to see that level, but then maybe five years ago, the purge of Sun Zhengcai, you know, it's still very recent, but that's really far less scale compared with 10 years ago. Now these are the incidents, certain not even in the certain high level, but quite interesting because some of them are well connected, including the arrest of Ren Zhiqiang, a prominent princeling critic arrested in March last year, then two Shanghai gang members on the, on the right column. One is the Vice Minister of Public Security. A domestic career from Shanghai, Sun Lijun, the other

is former Shanghai Mayor and the Police Chief, Gong Dao'an, both are member of Shanghai gang, arrested. Then also you look at the, the bottom. The two very important, well connected figures recently arrested. One is Dong Hong, and previously is a senior official in the anti-corruption establishment. The other is Chen Feng, a powerful chairman of the Hainan Airlines group also arrested. There are lot of peculiar things happening regarding Hainan Airline. So these are the things we could keep eyes on it, but I do not want to exaggerate to say everything will be, you know, will be leading towards the major, major crisis. But we still need to monitor all this development. Could be related with elite politics. But I, my view is public view. Most of these cases, bill already made before they are arrested or purged. Now the next one, Xi Jinping campaign and the change. Now Xi Jinping, especially from Chinese perspective, did a lot of things over the past nine to 10 years. He launched a bold, big and broad anti-corruption campaign, you know, purges 440 senior leaders, Vice Provincial and Vice Minister level, or army level, the level or above, including about 80 major generals or above, a lot of generals. So Chinese joke is the civil war only lasted two generals, but the, the, this is China in 19 later forties, I mean, or Japanese war someone said, but now 80 major generals. I mean a lot of actually the Lieutenant and four generals purged. 42 Members of the 18 Central Committee, purged. And relative speaking, 19th Party Congress is better. Only two members purged. Xi Jinping also launched large scale military reform. Really had a profound change, Chinese military. Three things, moving away from Russian model to the American model which is joint operation, emphasis on Navy and Air Force. Control of, you know, the command system directly, not by two levels, by the, all the departments and also promote the "Young guards" and also cohesive campaigns against Taiwan certainly got a lot of international attention. Chinese nationalism is on the rise. Strong poverty elimination, or, you know, alleviation actually should be elimination campaign. It's quite impressive. And draconian measures, certainly it's a controversial international domain, even domestically there's some concern. To control COVID 19 spread, but so far is effective in the country, and the green development campaign, you know, just to gives you mention example. 2008, before Xi Jinping become top leader, 16 most polluted cities in the world located in China, but 10 years later, 2018, the number Chinese most polluted cities in this country reduced to two. Instead 15, most polluted cities located in India. So Xi Jinping wants to get credit for that. And finally, it's a new proactive foreign policy, certainly very controversial in the international domain, but domestically people applaud belt road initiative, AIIB and China's global partner network, various forms. Now, in terms of anti-corruption campaign, it's really remarkable. These top five people, including Politburo Standing Committee in the, in the security four senior officers, I mean the most senior offices, include two vice chairman of CMC all purged, including the person in charge of the military operation in charge of personnel or propaganda, purged. So that's how strong, how bold, you know, could be. Now into poverty

elimination. Of course, Xi Jinping did not stop that. Den Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao all contributed that. But look at the past nine years under Xi Jinping's watch. It's a drastic increase of the budget. So certainly he want claim that he completed the most difficult part into poverty elimination, want to position himself as the mayor of the people. These photos certainly also show this kind of populist approach, moving away from the princeling image, particularly his recent call for common prosperity. Now, let me also mention, if for some of the previous factions, I would mention also further in couple minutes is replaced, what are Xi Jinping's power bases? Previously he based on princeling. So for the red nobility, but not anymore. I mean, actually he changed that even few years ago or maybe five or six years ago. So his Proteges and confidants are now largely the provincial leadership from his colleagues associate from Hebei, Fujian, Zhejiang and Shanghai. Especially from Zhejiang, I'm going to go back to that topic. The also the so-called Shaanxi Gang, because as we know that his father advanced his career from Shaanxi, his family. He also spent six or seven years as a sent down youth. He had some fellow colleagues, you know, he met at that time, including Wang Qishan, including Wang Cen currently Wang Qishan is a Politburo member. So this is a Xi Jinping's power base. And also military, as we know, Xi Jinping chose himself for DOD secretary, China's defense sec minister for two or three years. So he met some of the senior officers, and developed a long term relation. But more importantly, he promoted a lot of young guards, newly promoted, as I mentioned earlier. The other is he has a lot of Mishu himself. to run the office, general office, office director, chief of staff, and his personal Mishu. I don't want to go detail, there are a lot of them. And et cetera. These are the his power base. Now the previous major factions like princelings significant reduce. You see on 18th Party Congress, eight of nine of them, to the last party Congress, only four. And I predict the next Party Congress, you know, in a year. Probably only two, you know, of course, Xi Jinping's for sure, whether Shao Ji will enter the Politburo, I do not know. And so that's the princeling "Haizi Dang" reduced significantly. But even Tuanpai, his rival, Hu Jintao's protege, are also significantly reduced from the Politburo, 18 to six to three. Now, I predicted probably only one or maybe two if Wang Yang stay on. So that's the situation. And so these are two powerful factions now, really, significantly weakened. Now this is interesting. The chart, this is exam of the 62 provincial chiefs, 62 very prominent leaders. You can see under Hu Jintao, his protege Tuanpai increase, and they reached the peak in a year after he retired because there's a times stay on leg on, but then under Xi Jinping, they are quickly dropped. A lot of purges are the Tuanpai leaders. So now only one person, 1.6%. So this is talk about Xi Jinping's consolidating power, the change of factional dynamics in China. Now let me move to the last topic. The rising stars, clusters, and the characteristics, I think are probably the most interesting part for many China watchers. These are the leaders I predict will be very, very important. The top four will be the strongest candidate for

the next Politburo standing committee, whether be seven, or nine, and chances for three or all of them get the seats is pretty high. The next level is the nine leaders I identify. I wish I had more space. I can add a couple more, and these will be the leading candidates for, you know, the, the 13 or, or 12 seats vacant. Maybe even 14 or 15 seats. We do not know yet in the Politburo, right? This including Yuan Jiajun, I'm going to talk just a few minutes. Guangdong Governor, Ma Xingrui and Beijing Mayor, Chen Jining. I also will elaborate on him. Shanghai mayor, Gong Zheng, Liaoning Party Secretary, Zhang Guiqing, and Hunan Party Secretary, Zhang Qingwei, and only woman candidate from my database, Shen Yiqin and Guizhou Party Secretary, and Li Shulei who was really the brand. One of the, you know, advisors for Xi Jinping, advancing career from the Central Public School. And, and also another person is Jiang Jinqun. He actually made all the documents of the preparation for the central, for the next Party Congress. And he is the previous deputy of Wang Huning, but highly likely he will enter the Politburo, at least for the secretary. And he's currently already director of a policy research center, research office, the position Wang Huning used to hold. Now, let me very quickly mention several major fault projections, fault lines at the next Party Congress. I believe the post of Provincial Party Secretary is still a major stepping stone for the national leadership. But provincial leadership experience is less predominant. Some of them just served very quickly for two or three years, from the other areas, then move up. Not like previously, those people spend entire their life before move to center, serve as the local leaders in the county, in the municipal prefectural, and provincial. And, but that was changed. And those leaders of primary advanced their early careers in SOEs, state owned enterprises, especially in the aerospace industry, and also university administrations and the government think tank will constitute distinctive clusters. The new elite groups, some of them have, you know, briefly served as the top Provincial leaders, but that's only just more like symbolic for two or three years, more or less. And also, the major faction competition will likely occur among Xi Jinping's proteges, notably, within the powerful Zhejiang gang. There's so many people from Zhejiang were advanced, but still the seats is limited. So internal infighting, between Zhejiang leaders, Xi Jinping's proteges will be interesting phenomenon to, to look. And finally, leaders with Shanghai backgrounds, especially those who establish strong ties with Xi Jinping will likely take many important positions. Now, Xi Jinping is not a Shanghai gang member, although he spent eight months before he moved to the Beijing to be the Vice Chairman and the successor designate in Shanghai. But during his eight months, he developed a lot of very strong ties with Shanghai leaders. And also, two previous Shanghai gang leaders, Jiang Zemin and Zen Qinghong really played important roles to promote Xi Jinping, endorsed Xi Jinping. So the relationship was very interesting, but of course Xi Jinping at the same time, you know, do not want to let Shanghai gang continue to expand. So he wanted his own people, combined with some of Shanghai gang people. So change the nature of Shanghai political

leaders, but it's interesting development how that will unfold. Now, let me mention very quickly. I only have a few more minutes. When is, this is the type, the pie, the chart I made. I think that reflect that the Provincial Chief position Provincial Party Secretary and the Governors are stepping stones. About three quarters of the Politburo members, particularly the, in the 17th and the 18th Party Congress previously served as the, you know, Politburo members. So basically parliamentary chief. But the last Party Congress do see some reduce. I think it will be further reduced this time. And now let me mention only three rising stars. I think their experience could be exemplary. One is from the aerospace industry. One is from university, the other is from think tank. As I mentioned, these are the three clusters will be very, very important. And of course, some of the party ideals also will remain. Some, I do not get the impression all of them like them, but these are two people. Three groups are very, very prominent. I think in you will see, some of them will advance. And one is, I would not be surprised in five years, six years, one of them will become Premier of China. And now Yuan Jiajun. He advanced his career. He studied, you know, aerospace, aviation. You can see, look his school background in Beihang. And then also he was a visiting scholar in Germany for a year. He really played leadership role in aerospace. He's a Commander in Chief, or Deputy Commander in Chief in like the Shenzhou Spacecraft System. And then China's Manned Space Engineering Program. China's Lunar Exploration Projects. These are real, real aerospace project. He served as the top leaders. Then after that, he moved to the provincial leadership. And in first in, of course also served as the, some of the very important companies for a while. Corporations and Research Institute then become Vice Governor of Ningxia very briefly. Then the Executive Vice Governor of Zhejiang, and the governor of Zhejiang, now he is a Party Secretary for Zhejiang. Now, the next one is Beijing mayor. Also from Dong Bei. He studied, got his undergraduate and graduate from Tsinghua, then went to London to study in the Imperial College and got his PhD in Environmental System Analysis. He actually spent all altogether, 10 years in London and, and also after that, he returned to Tsinghua, served as Department Chair, Vice Chairman, Chair, and President, then moved on to be the Minister of Environmental Protection and currently mayor of Beijing. So he is a, will be perfect person to deal with the climate change issues in China. So he probably will further get the promotion. The last person is Yin Li. He's currently Fujian Party Secretary. His educational background is largely in medicine and also got his MD and in Shandong Medical School, and then also PhD in Russia, in Public Health, and also served as visiting scholar at Harvard. I think it's, it's not in the Kennedy Center or not in the Fairbank or Asia center. I think in the Public Health Research Institute. I mean, what they call, I not know. I forgot. But also this is a four year. So it's not, that's unfamiliar with Harvard. He served as Vice Chairman of the executive committee of WHO and then he advanced career, early career, really in the think tank environment, like the particularly think tank under the state council for 10 years,

if not longer. Then also moved on to be officer in the Public Health Ministry, including the director of state food and drug safety. So he's expert expert in this area. He served as Governor of Sichuan, and then now Provincial Party Secretary of Fujian, very important Provincial leadership. So he's also on the rise. So all these three people represent different clusters. Finally, this is my one of the last charts or the picture I wanna show about the Shanghai born leaders or leaders with Shanghai experience. Look at the history. They always play very, very important role. But my prediction is next Party Congress you will see even stronger. If it's nine members, will be five. If it's the seven, probably three, you know, and so that's prediction. You look at these, you know, Xi Jinping for sure. He, Han Zheng, I mentioned, could be possibility. And Ding Xueshang, Li Chan and Lin Shi also served as the deputy party secretary organizing department head in Shanghai for many years and currently Guangdong Party Secretary. So these are the, the importance of Shanghai. And actually my book this mentioned about the middle class Shanghai, there's one chapter, a long chapter about the Shanghai leadership, their characteristics, their style, how they differ from other regions. And, also I'm working on another book. Xi Jinping's Proteges, Rising Elite Groups in the Chinese Leadership. We'll elaborate on these three groups and more, in this forthcoming book. Thank you very much. I'm sorry, Todd, actually already very long. Liz, over to you.

- Okay. Thank you so much for a really informative, very, very rich talk and very lively talk, Cheng. Let me lead off with a question or two of my own, and then we already have a number that have come through the Q and A that I'll try to get to as well. So let me ask you a question of kind of how you assess the caliber and strength of this emerging set of leaders that you talked about. Now at the end, these look like very impressive individuals. PhDs from London and elsewhere, times that they spent at Harvard University, and the like. People who have strong careers in aerospace, think tanks, universities, people who come from Shanghai, cosmopolitan connections, people who've served in Zhejiang another really progressive area. And I think about that. And I, I don't know if you've had a chance to read the forthcoming book by Victor Shih. It's due out in April, and Victor entitles his book "Coalitions of the Weak". And it's a fascinating book in which he looks at the way in which Mao after the great leap forward developed what he calls a coalition of a lot of other weak leaders to surround him, because Mao felt actually quite insecure about his own status at that time. And so wanted to have other leaders in the Politburo and the Standing Committee who were compromised in some way, or who didn't have independent political networks. And therefore he could really control. And Victor in his book suggests that Xi also has been developing a coalition of the weak as what he presumes is a kind of expression of Xi's own sense of insecurity. Vis a vis the Elite. On the one hand, we've seen this really impressive purge of the military and other sectors, the anti-corruption drive, that's gotten rid of many of the preexisting factions and so forth, but according to

Victor's analysis, the leaders who've been promoted have very weak political networks. So they may look really impressive in terms of educational credentials or other kinds of aspects of their resume. But in terms of politics, they're not in a position to challenge the leader. And Victor argues that that buys short term security for the leader, especially as the leader is aging and becomes less secure about their own power and more concerned about the possibility of younger potential challengers rising up. But he believes that it's also a fundamental vulnerability for the system that if a leader starts doing that and surrounds himself with a coalition of the weak, that he's opening the door in the future to the top leadership not really being able to effectively deal with major policy challenges. And so he sees that as, doesn't give the exact timeframe, and it would clearly depend on various kinds of crises, either domestic or international, but, but I would be interested in your thoughts about that. Whether you see Xi as building this coalition of the weak, whether you see these folks from Shanghai Zhejiang, with these impressive academic credentials, as a kind of coalition of competence and strength, or one that has a certain kind of vulnerability that ultimately may create some real problems.

- Okay, this is certainly it's excellent question. I haven't read Victor's Shih's work, but I'm going to read that book. This is a, a certainly varied point. I still disagree that kind of analysis, but I wanted to mention that is a sheer concern. Even within China. Some people said those leaders who did not have strong provincial experience, they may not be tough enough to deal with some of the, you know, challenges. Those from grass roots. It's really a struggle to the top, but I mean, the three leader mentioned it's, you know, from elsewhere. But here I want to make three points. First of all, I mentioned three, these three examples, as I said, these are examples, the three group I mentioned, but my book actually, we mentioned other group, including remaining groups, including people have a different background, have no foreign education, no foreign experience. It's work in the ideology sector, . So these two, their relationship is interesting. But the one point I want to mention, Xi Jinping at least at the moment, still rely on at least partially, maybe also significantly on people like Liu He who got a PhD. I forgot, you know, MPA from Harvard and also the forthcoming people like the three leaders I mentioned. Now this is number two. Number three, those from the technical or technocratic, or science background, they may not necessarily weak. Just to give you background, those from company. I mean, Li Peng actually advanced this career from not so much early on in the, in the provincial things. And Zhu Rongji is also technocrat. And both of them are tough in different ways. And besides, we should not forget that Xi Jinping was considered as a weak leader before he become the number one. We do not know. Again, their personality is very, very important. It's very difficult to generalization. Those got high education, PhD, may not be tough enough to deal with challenges. And also, we really do not know that whether at the moment they

consider as relatively, not as strong, but things could change very quickly, right? They need to be tested. They will be tested, or some people keep a low profile. This exactly happened to Xi Jinping early on. But some of the, the things we, you know, follow, actually show their kind of educational caliber and also some other kind of skills. But at one point, I think Liz, you agree, the importance is the diversity of the background, the experience. Not just the modernistic kind of career path. It's very, very important. So in that I think three new groups contributed the process. Now, princeling has strength. Panpai has its strength, but they also have the weaknesses. But my point is, China enter a new kind of phase of the elite politics. Some of them still there, some of them reduce their significance, but we do need to look at the future trajectory, the pattern, the composition. So my discussion, it's not entirely say that the view by Victor and also, I think it's a good point, excellent point, but I just want to clarify, you know, it's far too early to have the generalization to say that the weak, Xi Jinping only promote weak leaders. And, but again, you cannot teaching student does not like king makers, like, you know, Liu Yan in the military, Liu Shaoqi's son. He certainly sometimes, but on the other hand, we should not forget, in his first term, he used, Wang Qishan they play very, very important role. Wang Qishan is a very strong leader. Right.

- That's true.

- So that's, that's, that's my answer to your excellent question.

- Although Victor argues that Xi could have kept Wang on the Standing Committee despite the age limit, but didn't do so. In part, because he didn't want such a charismatic. I'm so confused, no. One could argue this, I guess, in both directions, but, but let me turn to, since you talked about the importance of diversity and composition of this, several of the members of the audience could not help, but be struck with the virtually all male lineup, certainly all male in the past. And only one, I guess, provincial party secretary of, of Guizhou, is it?

- [Cheng] Yes. Guizhou.

- [Liz] Yeah.

- [Cheng] Shen Yiqing And so, and so several of the questions asked about the lack of both women and ethnic minorities in the top leadership and whether this is a problem for the party, how the party explains this, and whether ordinary people see this as a kind of problem or a weakness of the party.

- Well, I see it's, it's a problem. It's still, I do not have sufficient information to know how Chinese the public can see that, whether it's a problem or not. I certainly work in elite study for a

long time. I believe that's a problem. I think diversity is important. And now, so you see that, my book, document, you know, in the different levels and female representation and etcetera. But I also need to mention, to emphasize gender balance is still relatively same. Even in Western democracies. And 20 years ago, 30 years ago was different picture. In some of the corporations in corporate America, still not balanced at all, right? And so if we, democracy, Western countries also face some challenges, and only the achievements made in recent years. So sometimes we may need to put in that perspective. Now, there's some welcome development on the minority issues. I certainly hope there will be minority one or two enter the Politburo, but the candidates, actually, I have also have you know, written on that subject. I'm going write more on that subject. But at the moment the pool is not strong because you do need to prepare them. But the good thing is in this five minority regions, there's a law indicate. The governor or chairman the government side should be minority. The Party Secretary, number one person, usually is Han almost all Han, but the number 2 person is a minority. So that's already become part of the law implemented. I think, for example, that they just appointed another Tibetan, although he has like Chinese like name, but it's Tibetan. And to be the chairman, just like a governor, the same things with Xinjiang, it's a relatively young member. Also in the prefecture level, and lower, it's the same thing. This is a Chinese law adopted a couple of decades ago. Now for women, certainly that's not so encouraging. There's in China's history that no woman ever served on the Politburo Standing Committee. Previously, there are two, I mean, it's not last party, not current one, but the last one, there are two females in the Politburo, but now only one, right? I think this time probably it's also just a one, but the encouraging things, because Chinese leadership recruitment heavily emphasized on your educational background, but the educational trajectory show actually women, constitute more in terms of undergraduate and also women constitute like a, you know, MA degrees, probably it's very close to half. 38% of PhDs are women. So I think this encourages development. As times goes on, there will be more demand, the bigger pool to select talented women. I think, I hope that will be fixed in the future, but I think it's a problem. I'm not too optimistic for this Party Congress. I certainly distracted that the last Party Congress, the Politburo Standing, Politburo, even no minority member, I mean the current one. So let's see, because when the preparation document that they just announced said that they will put emphasis on women and minority, let's see whether it is a lip service or there's a real effort to make that happen.

- Let me ask you about another kind of diversity also that several members of the audience raised, and that is diversity of views, policy differences. Do you think there is still room for debate on issues in the Standing Committee of the Politburo, or has Xi Jinping's success at stamping out potentially rival factions also had a kind of deadening effect on the ability of people to raise alternative views

and for there to be any kind of robust discussion at the highest levels?

- Well, this is excellent question. At the surface, you do not see any debate. Where previously, even before Xi Jinping, the factional check and balance it's, it's not illegal, not completely, you know, clear, transparent at all. But on the other hand, you ask a taxi driver, they will tell you which leader represent, I mean, which faction, and usually, those who from the inland region have the more policy leaning towards inland region. Those from coastal region leaning towards policy for coastal region. Shanghai, you see Cen Yangyu the former party secretary, the chairman of Xi Jinping, Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao's macroeconomic policy and etcetera. You do still see the debate about the property, how serious that issue even now. So it's subtle, you should read between line. So it's a lack of being transparent, but, but it will be self deceiving for us overseas observers to think the Chinese leadership is a monolithic group with the same idea, same background, same views, same policy reference preferences. No, they're not. I mean, there's this tremendous indication show there are lot of differences. Now what is remarkable things is by, Xi Jinping, sometimes he come from princeling background, but he's tried to surprise others by moving away from princeling to become, present him as a man of the people by anti corruption, by many other things. Now, this is also true that we do need to be flexible to see, but that change itself refers tremendous pressure of Chinese societal force because Chinese leaders, including Wang Qishan, including other senior leaders, mention China has public opinion too. We should not forget when February, 20 20, when Dr. Li Wenliang whistle blower, the case, there's a real crisis, real challenge. But that's not a long time ago. Why? So you do need to respond. Again. It is just a, I mean, self deceiving. They say these are all the same. They're only just yes, yes, man. Follow the policies. Of course, at the moment, there's a very strong, tight control. There's no question. There's a personality cut, but the backlash is also there. Again, these are, they well-informed people and relatively speaking, many of them are very capable people. They know what we are talking about. And also I mentioned even within the , they have lot of different, you know, things at the moment. Maybe it's more for power, but also power will link to policies, link to social group, interest groups. Particularly it's noticeable that the people like I just mentioned, he mentioned common prosperity. The key word is prosperity. It's not anti private sector, but you also see some other leaders just to be very cynical about this private sector. They emphasize on equality. So that's the interesting, you know, difference. We could, we do have, you know, reasonably good information to show the differences, some tensions. Over to you. Yeah.

- Okay. Also, you, you mentioned the large number of very prominent people who have been purged or attacked during the anti-corruption campaign and are leaving the question of what influence this really has on the elite. And a question that also came up in the Q and A was

whether the recent accusations by Peng Shuai, the tennis star against Zhang Gaoli, a former member of the Politburo, whether that has any chance do you think of also affecting the image or the standing of the political elite in, in, in the popular opinion?

- Sure. I will have be happy answer the second question, but the first question I just missed it. I just saw this a fun question to me. So could you repeat the first question? The first question?

- So the, the question about Peng Shuai?

- No, the, I know that question, but the first question, the early one, you said that you had two questions, right?

- Oh my, my own earlier questions. My, my own earlier question was actually going to be about Gongtong Fuyu and you answered it really. It was gonna kinda about what it really means, what common prosperity really means, and whether there are different interpretations.

- Okay.

- [Liz] And along what lines you think develop.

- [Cheng] Okay So you've actually gotten to that. And I have a number of others too, but I'll send them to you.

- [Cheng] Okay So let me quickly answer inside question. This is an important question. Actually, I was approached by many people, journalists, too, for that one, but I actually declined because I do not have enough information what's going on. So I do not want to spread rumor. Financial Time still quote me because I was the person who wrote the profile of Zhang Gaoli, a bio of Zhang Gaoli in Wikipedia. That's why the, the reason that why they always approach me. Now, there's no question for me, Zhang Gaoli advanced career from his strong ties with some of the people like Zheng Qinhong like Jiang Zemin, so he is a part of, you know, Jiang Zemin-Zheng Qinhong's coalition. Also, he advanced from the Shenzhen and the et cetera, later Tianjin This, you can see the, the trajectory. So whether this is related with someone who wanted to use that case for factional reason, again, I do not have sufficient information to answer that question. It's possible, but the, the, the things is that particularly, why this, her Twitter lasted for, you know, at least 30 minutes, because the Chinese, you know, machine reading things can crack down very quickly. But even that story also spread, not cracked down for a few days. That give you some kind of indication, maybe related with faction politics. But on the other hand, the Chinese interpretation, this is Western anti-China forces use that case to try to boycott, mobilize sources to, you know, boycott Olympics. So at least the current discourse in China is centered around that narrative, but that narrative will play very, very important role.

Even someone wanted to play the politics. Elite politics were not continue to play around that. So that's actually interesting to see this kind of foreign interpretation actually have the impact, the trajectory or discourse or narrative in China. It's fascinating to see that kind of dynamics. So again, it's possible, but I do not have sufficient information even, but I just say it is true, based my early study of Zhang Gaoli. He is a part of that faction or coalition.

- I think we're almost at time. So I'm just gonna ask you one final question that a couple of the members of our audience raised, and that is whether you think Xi Jinping will be known as Chairman of the Communist Party in the future, or will he continue to be primarily known as the General Secretary of the Party?

- Well, I do not see an initiative for the next year's Party Congress for change the title from General Secretary to Chairman. Unless there will be surprise move. So I do not want to count on that. I just more the outside speculation, I cannot predict six years ago, six years later, you know, who, who knows, but I think there's no incentive at this point to change that title. And there's no narrative from the Chinese official documents to do so. And so I'm, I'm not convinced that it will be the move.

- And since he's already Chair of state, he's already, he's already Xi Zhuxi it doesn't need to be a double Zhuxi.

- Double Zhujia. Yeah. Because you open some things to waste so much, you know, capital to spend on that necessary things, you know. And also, look at the Chinese history. You know, Bill knows, I wait to see him on the screen that the Mao Zedong don't want to, you know, use that the change with chairman, this, this is a linked to the, the serious problem with Lin Biao, you know, solely that the term, I mean, this Chinese will immediately sense that. So what's the point? No, I don't see the rationale. I could be wrong, but at this point, at least from the Chinese document, Chinese narrative, I follow very closely, do not see that any indication. Yeah.

- And so far, Cheng, you have a much better track record in predicting elite changes in China than most of us have in predicting American US elections. So congratulations on your track record to date, and we'll all be holding up your predictions against the lineup at the 20th Party Congress. And I thank you very much for a really informative, and very fascinating discussion today.

- Thank you. Thank you so much, Liz, and thank you for all the excellent questions. Thank you for Bill and Winnie. Yeah. Great.

- Great. And thank you for your gracious comments at the beginning about the Fairbank Center for Chinese studies. I think all of us at the Fairbank Center are very grateful for that.

- Thank you. Thank you.
- Thank you so much, and thanks to everyone for listening.
- [Cheng] Bye bye. Hi Bill. Great to see you. I hope it's okay.