

Wang Huning 王沪宁

Born 1955



Current Positions

- Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the CCP Central Committee (2017–present)
- Member of the 19th Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) (2017–present)
- Head of the Central Spiritual Civilization Steering Committee of the CCP Central Committee (2017–present)
- Head of the Central Leading Group for Propaganda and Ideology (2017–present)
- Head of the Central Leading Group for Party Building Work (2017–present)
- Deputy Head of the Central Institutional Organization Committee (2017–present)
- Deputy Head of the Central Comprehensive Reform Committee (2018–present)
- Deputy Head of the Central Committee for Comprehensive Ruling by Law (2018–present)
- Deputy Head of the Central Integrated Military-Civilian Development Committee (2018–present)
- Deputy Head of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Committee (2018–present)
- Deputy Head of the Central Leading Group for Covid-19 Outbreak Response (2020–present)
- Member of the Politburo (2012–present)
- Full member of the Central Committee of the CCP (2002–present)

Personal and Professional Background

Wang Huning was born on October 6, 1955, in Shanghai. His ancestral/family home is in Laizhou County, Shandong Province. Wang joined the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1984. He studied French language as part of the Cadre Training Class at Shanghai Normal University in Shanghai (1972–77) and pursued a graduate program in international politics at Fudan University in Shanghai (1978–81), where he also received a master’s degree in law (1981). Wang was a visiting scholar at the University of Iowa, the University of Michigan, and the University of California, Berkeley (1988–89).

Wang began his career as a cadre in the Publication Bureau of the Shanghai municipal government (1977–78). After receiving his master’s degree, Wang stayed on at Fudan University and served as an instructor, associate professor, and professor (1981–89), then as chairman of the Department of International Politics (1989–94), and finally as dean of the law school (1994–95). Wang moved to Beijing in 1995 to serve as head of the Political Affairs Division of the Central Policy Research Office (CPRO) of the CCP Central Committee (1995–98). He then became deputy director of the CPRO (1998–2002) and, later, director (2002–20). He also served as secretary-general (chief of staff) and director of the General Office of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms (2013–18). Wang was first elected to the Central Committee as a full member at the 16th Party Congress in 2002.

Family and Patron-Client Ties

Wang Huning is one of only a few leaders favored by all three of the most recent party bosses: Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping. Accordingly, Wang has earned the nickname “chief advisor of Zhongnanhai” and “China’s Kissinger.”¹ Wang is thought to have served as an informal conduit between Jiang and Hu during Hu’s leadership. In the late 1980s, Wang established his patron-mentor relationship with Jiang Zemin and Zeng Qinghong, who were then top leaders in Shanghai. After Hu succeeded Jiang as general secretary of the CCP and president of the PRC in 2002 and 2003, respectively, Wang became a top aide to Hu and frequently accompanied him on domestic and

international trips. Like Xi's chief of staff, Li Zhanshu, Wang Huning was often beside Xi Jinping throughout his first term, taking part in almost all important domestic and international trips and meetings.

Wang's ex-wife, Zhou Qi, is the daughter of a leader who worked in state security and intelligence and reached the rank of vice-minister. Wang and Zhou were classmates in the master's program in international politics at Fudan University, and Zhou later received a Ph.D. in political science from Johns Hopkins University's Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. The couple divorced in 1996 and do not have any children. Wang married a nurse in Zhongnanhai several years ago, and the couple has one child.

Policy Preferences and Political Prospects

Wang is believed to have been a principal drafter of the "three represents" theory expounded by Jiang.² In his early career as a political science professor and law school dean at Fudan University in the 1980s, Wang published many books on comparative politics and political theory. At that time, he was considered a leading scholar and advocate for neo-authoritarianism.³ Wang Huning recently re-published a 1986 article in which he argued that "public security, prosecutors, and the court merging into one" was the main reason for the prevalence of human rights violations, such as torture and vandalism, during the Cultural Revolution. He stated unambiguously that "the Cultural Revolution could happen only in a country without an independent judicial system."⁴

Over the past three decades, virtually all PSC members have served in provincial or municipal leadership roles or as government leaders on the State Council, and most have served in more than two province-level administrations. In contrast, Wang advanced his political and professional career primarily through work in the CPRO, a prominent CCP think tank. Wang thus represents a new channel for elite recruitment. Further, his rise to the top leadership is very much in line with Xi Jinping's call to build new think tanks with Chinese characteristics, which aims to further China's strategic mission and integrate the Western-style "revolving door" into China's political system.⁵

Under Xi's leadership, Wang is believed to be the source of Xi's signature political concepts and a more assertive foreign policy.⁶ Wang emphasizes the importance of respecting the prevailing political, social, and cultural conditions in China.⁷ He argues that China's reform should not be pursued at the expense of stability and that strong, unified central leadership is crucial to China's development.

Wang may remain on the PSC for another five-year term after 2022. If so, he may serve as chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) or chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in 2023. But more likely, Wang will step down from the PSC at the 20th Party Congress and serve in a more ceremonial governmental position.

Compiled by Cheng Li and the staff of the John L. Thornton China Center at Brookings

Notes:

¹ Pratik Jakhar, "China party congress: The rising stars of China's Communist Party," BBC Online, October 8, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-41322178>.

² In contrast to the Marxist notion that the Communist Party should be the "vanguard of the working class," Jiang's theory claims that the CCP should represent the "developmental needs of the advanced forces of production," the "forward direction of advanced culture," and the "fundamental interests of the majority of the Chinese people."

³ For the early career of Wang Huning and his writings, see "Hu Jintao's two mysterious right-hand men: Ling Jihua and Wang Huning" [胡锦涛身边的神秘左右手: 令计划和王沪宁], *Social Perspective* [社会聚焦], posted on April 7, 2010, http://bbs.tiexue.net/post2_4181927_1.html.

⁴ Wang Huning, "Reflections on the Cultural Revolution and the Reform of China's Political System" [文革反思与政治改

革], *Readers' Digest* [文摘], February 23, 2012, originally appeared in *The World Economic Herald* [世界经济导报], May 1986.

⁵ Cheng Li and Lucy Xu, "Chinese Think Tanks: A New 'Revolving Door' for Elite Recruitment," *China-US Focus*, January 26, 2017, <http://www.chinausfocus.com/political-social-development/chinese-think-tanks-a-new-revolving-door-for-elite-recruitment>.

⁶ Hugh Hewitt, "In China, Wang Huning is the man to see", *The Washington Post*, December 16, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/12/16/china-wang-huning-is-man-see/>

⁷ Yi Wang, "Meet the mastermind behind Xi Jinping's power", *The Washington Post*, November 6, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/theworldpost/wp/2017/11/06/wang-huning/>