The Revenge of Wen Jiabao

The ouster of Chongqing boss Bo Xilai was 30 years in the making -- a long, sordid tale of elite families and factions vying for the soul of the Chinese Communist Party.

BY JOHN GARNAUT | MARCH 29, 2012

If Premier Wen Jiabao is "China's best actor," as his critics allege, he saved his finest performance for last. After three hours of eloquent and emotional answers in his final news conference at the National People's Congress annual meeting this month, Wen uttered his public political masterstroke, reopening debate on one of the most tumultuous events in the Chinese Communist Party's history and hammering the final nail in the coffin of his great rival, the now-deposed Chongqing Communist Party boss Bo Xilai. And in striking down Bo, Wen got his revenge on a family that had opposed him and his mentor countless times in the past.

Responding to a gently phrased question about Chongqing, Wen foreshadowed Bo's political execution, a seismic leadership rupture announced the following day that continues to convulse China's political landscape to an extent not seen since 1989. But the addendum that followed might be even more significant. Indirectly, but unmistakably, Wen defined Bo as man who wanted to repudiate China's decades-long effort to reform its economy, open to the world, and allow its citizens to experience modernity. He framed the struggle over Bo's
legacy as a choice between urgent political reforms and "such historical tragedies as the Cultural Revolution," culminating a 30-year battle for two radically different versions of China, of which Bo Xilai and Wen Jiabao are the ideological heirs. In Wen's world, bringing down Bo is the first step in a battle between China's Maoist past and a more democratic future as personified by his beloved mentor, 1980s Communist Party chief Hu Yaobang. His words blew open the facade of party unity that had held since the massacres of Tiananmen Square.

This October, the Communist Party will likely execute a once-in-a-decade leadership transition in which President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen hand over to a new team led by current Vice President Xi Jinping. The majority of leaders will retire from the elite Politburo Standing Committee, and the turnover will extend down through lower tiers of the Communist Party, the government, and the military. Wen hopes his words influence who gets key posts, what ideological course they will set, and how history records his own career.

Wen Jiabao and Bo Xilai have long stood out from their colleagues for their striking capacities to communicate and project their individual personalities and ideologies beyond the otherwise monochromatic party machine. The two most popular members of the Politburo, they are also the most polarizing within China's political elite. They have much in common, including a belief that the Communist Party consensus that has prevailed for three decades -- "opening and reform" coupled with uncompromising political control -- is crumbling under the weight of inequality, corruption, and mistrust. But the backgrounds, personalities, and political prescriptions of these two crusaders could not be more different.

Bo has deployed his prodigious charisma and political skills to attack the status quo in favor of a more powerful role for the state. He displayed an extraordinary capacity to mobilize political and financial resources during his four and a half year tenure as the head of the Yangtze River megalopolis of Chongqing. He transfixed the nation by smashing the city's mafia -- together with uncooperative officials, lawyers, and entrepreneurs -- and rebuilding a state-centered city economy while shamelessly draping himself in the symbolism of Mao Zedong. He sent out a wave of revolutionary nostalgia that led to Mao quotes sent as text messages, government workers corralled to sing "red songs," and old patriotic programming overwhelming Chongqing TV.

From his leftist or "statist" perch, Bo has been challenging the "opening and reform" side of the political consensus that Deng Xiaoping secured three decades ago. Wen Jiabao, meanwhile, who plays the role of a learned, emphatic, and upright Confucian prime minister, has been challenging the other half of Deng consensus -- absolute political control -- from the liberal right. He has continuously articulated the need to limit government power through rule of law, justice, and democratization. To do this, he has drawn on the symbolic legacies of the purged reformist leaders he served in the 1980s, particularly Hu Yaobang, whose name he recently helped to "rehabilitate" in official discourse. As every Communist Party leader knows, those who want a stake in the country's future must first fight for control of its past.

Until last month Bo appeared to hold the cards, with his networks of princelings -- the children of high cadres -- and the gravitational force of his "Chongqing Model" pulling the nation toward him, while Wen's efforts had
produced few practical results. Bo earned his reputation as a rising star until Feb. 6 when his police chief and right-hand man, Wang Lijun, drove to an appointment at the local British consulate to shake his official minders and then veered off and fled for his life down the highway into the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu. He carried with him allegations of sordid tales of Bo family criminal behavior including in relation to the death of British businessman Neil Heywood, according to Western government officials. In Beijing's eyes, this was the highest-level known attempted defection in 40 years, and it occurred on Bo's watch. Wang "betrayed the country and went over to the enemy," said President Hu Jintao, according to a Chinese intelligence official.

Wen, the son of a lowly teacher, saw his family constantly criticized and attacked during the Cultural Revolution, and rose to power by impressing a series of revolutionary veterans. Bo, in contrast, was born to rule The son of revolutionary leader Bo Yibo, he studied at the nation's most prestigious middle school, Beijing No. 4. Bo had not yet turned 17 when a rift between the princeling children and those with "bad class backgrounds" erupted into class warfare. In June 1966, in the early months of the Cultural Revolution, one of Bo's school mates invented the rhyming ditty that became the anthem for the princelings that led the early Red Guard movement: "The father's a hero, the son's a brave lad; the father's a reactionary, the son's a bastard."

The student red guards at Beijing No. 4 turned an old eating hall into a gruesome incarceration chamber for the teachers and other reactionaries they captured. They painted the popular slogan "Long live the red terror" on the wall, in human blood.

Within months, however, Mao directed his Cultural Revolution toward his comrades-in-arms and unleashed a coterie of lesser-born red guards against the old "royalist" ones. Bo Xilai spent six years in a prison cell. His father, Bo Yibo, was tortured. Red Guards abducted Bo's mother in Guangzhou and murdered her, or she committed suicide; if any records exist, they remain sealed.

Since former leader Deng Xiaoping's 1981 "Resolution on History," the Cultural Revolution has officially been a "catastrophe," but the Communist Party never explained what happened. It was left as little more than a name, signifying bad but unknown things. By raising the specter of the Cultural Revolution, Wen Jiabao has opened a crack in the vault of Communist Party history: that great black box that conceals the struggles, brutality, partial truths and outright fabrications upon which China has built its economic and social transformation. Beneath his carefully layered comments is a profound challenge to the uncompromising manner in which the Chinese Communist Party has always gone about its business. And to grasp what the Cultural Revolution means to Wen Jiabao requires taking a journey through the life of his mentor, the 1980s reformist leader Hu Yaobang who ran the Communist Party in its most vibrant era.

Hu Yaobang was struck down from his job at the helm of the Communist Youth League on Aug. 13, 1966, five days before Chairman Mao presided over the first mass rally of the Cultural Revolution. Detained for six weeks, Red Guards beat and abused him and forced him to stand for hours with a huge wooden placard hanging from his neck and his arms wrenched behind his back. Six weeks later, as they retired for their national holidays, they called Hu's eighteen year-old son Hu Dehua to pick him up. "I cried when I saw his appearance," Hu Dehua told
me. "He told me 'don't be such a good-for-nothing, let's go home, it doesn't matter.'"

Hu Yaobang was already back at work when Mao died, in 1976, and the Communist Party united behind the idea of moving on from the Cultural Revolution but lacked any further roadmap. Appointed head of the powerful Organization Department, Hu led a crusade to "seek truths from facts" -- for ideology to yield to reality -- and to rehabilitate fallen comrades. Deng, who by 1980 had secured his position as paramount leader, elevated Hu to general secretary of the Communist Party.

By the early 1980s the Communist Party was rapidly retreating from everyday social life. As the economy grew, Chinese people began to enjoy a degree of personal freedoms, but the essential norms of internal party politics remained unchanged. At crucial junctures there were no enforceable rules, no independent arbiters, only power.

In 1985, while most elders had been appointing each other or each other's children to important positions, Hu Yaobang recruited Wen Jiabao, the teacher's son, to run his Central Office -- a position akin to cabinet secretary. The following year Hu Yaobang's elder son, Hu Deping, spoke in terms uncannily similar to Wen Jiabao's of two weeks ago. "The Cultural Revolution was a tragedy," he said to the then propaganda minister, at a time when his father was at the height of his power. "It will not appear again in the same form, but a cultural revolution once or even twice removed cannot be ruled out from once again recurring."

Perhaps he had an inkling of what was coming. By 1986 the tensions between an increasingly market-oriented economy and more liberal social environment began to clash with Communist Party elders' demand for absolute political control. Hu Yaobang tried to limit corruption among the elders' children, studiously ignored conservative ideological campaigns, and tolerated student protests. By the end of that year the elders had had enough.

Then, as during the Cultural Revolution, and as remains the case today, no rules governed Hu Yaobang's downfall; just a group of backstage power brokers who judged that he had gone too far. In January 1987, 21 years after his purging in the Cultural Revolution, party elders subjected Hu to a torrid five-day criticism and humiliation session called a "Democratic Party Life meeting." The harshest of Hu's critics was Bo Xilai's father.

Hu Dehua, the youngest son, lives at home with his wife in the same large but rundown courtyard home, just west of Beijing's closed-off leadership district Zhongnanhai, where he has lived nearly all of his life. His recollections about what the Cultural Revolution meant to his family and his father, Hu Yaobang, informs the story that Wen Jiabao is telling today.

Hu Dehua tells how his father was pained, but not surprised, when Communist Party elders used his own political demise to drive an "anti-bourgeois liberalization" campaign across China. Party apparatchiks instructed Hu Dehua to show his ideological opposition to his own father's political platform, but he refused.

"It was the same as 1966. If someone was said to be 'liberalized', then everyone would line up to criticize them,"
Hu Dehua said. "The country was turning back at a time when it should be have been democratizing and transitioning to rule of law."

Hu Dehua told his father how pessimistic he felt about his country’s future. Hu Yaobang agreed that the methods and ideologies of the 1987 anti-liberalization movement came straight from the Cultural Revolution. But he told his son to gain some historical perspective, and reminded him that Chinese people were not joining in the elite power games as they had 20 years before. He called the anti-liberalization campaign a "medium-sized cultural revolution" and warned that a small cultural revolution would no doubt follow, Hu Dehua told me. As society developed, Hu Yaobang told his son, the middle and little cultural revolutions would gradually fade from history's stage.

It is fortunate, perhaps, that Hu Yaobang could not see how his death in April 1989 triggered an outpouring of public grief at Tiananmen Square, as Chinese students held him up his honesty and humanity in contrast to their perception of other leaders of the time. The protests morphed into a mass demonstration for liberalization and democratization and against growing corruption among children of the political elite.

Wen Jiabao remained in charge of the Communist Party Central Office, now working for Hu Yaobang’s increasingly reformist successor, Zhao Ziyang. A famous photo shows Wen standing behind Zhao's shoulder as his boss declared the haunting words "I've come too late" to students who refused to leave the square. Shortly afterward, Deng and the party elders ordered in the tanks, triggering another Cultural Revolution-style convulsion and adding a new bloody file to the Communist Party's vault of history. Bo Yibo moved to have Wen purged, according to a source whose father was a minister at the time, but other elders were impressed with how Wen shifted his loyalty from Zhao (who spent the rest of his life under house arrest) and supported martial law. Wen played by the rules of a ruthless system, his family -- especially his wife and son -- leveraged his official status for their own business interests, while his career progression resumed.

Hu Yaobang was largely airbrushed from official history after his purge in 1987. But because he did not publicly challenge the Communist Party, he maintained his legacy and his supporters, including all of the current and likely future party chiefs and premiers: Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao, Xi Jinping, and Li Keqiang. All four regularly visit the Hu family home during Spring Festival. But only Wen Jiabao has publicly honored his mentor's legacy.

Two years ago, on the 21st anniversary of Hu Yaobang's death, Wen penned an essay in the People's Daily that was remarkable in a nation whose leaders rarely give any public hint of their personal lives. "What he taught me in those years is engraved on my heart," wrote Wen. Of the four top leaders who regularly pay homage to Hu Yaobang's old home, Wen Jiabao has the warmest connection with Hu Yaobang's widow and four children.

Hu taught his children to resist the idea, wired into the Communist Party psyche, that they had any particular hereditary right to high office. Nevertheless the oldest son, Hu Deping, rose to vice minister rank in the United Front Department. And last year he used his princeling heritage and networks to organize and say things that
would have banished lesser-born men to jail. He published a book about his father, with a forward written by Wen. He organized a series of closed-door seminars for leading intellectuals and other princeling children of reformist leaders to try and build a consensus for reform.

The first and most low-key seminar, in July, ignited what became a raging public debate about Bo Xilai's "Chongqing Model" versus its possible antidote, the more liberal "Guangdong Model." The second, in August, celebrated the 35th anniversary of the arrest of Mao's radical "Gang of Four," which slammed the door shut on the Cultural Revolution just weeks after Mao's death in August 1976. **The third, in September,** explored the 30th anniversary of the 1981 Resolution on History, which had confirmed the Cultural Revolution as a catastrophe that must never occur again.

It was at the September gathering that Hu Deping set down the themes that Wen later referred to in his press conference, and **published his comments on a website** dedicated to chronicling the life and times of his father: "The bottom line is making sure to adopt the attitude of criticizing and fundamentally denouncing the Cultural Revolution ... In recent years, for whatever reason, there seems to be a 'revival' of something like advocating the Cultural Revolution. Some people cherish it; some do not believe in the Cultural Revolution but nevertheless exploit it and play it up. I think we must guard this bottom line!"

The subtext, only barely concealed, was that Bo Xilai must be stopped from dragging Communist Party back toward its most radical, lawless past. How, one could be forgiven for asking, could Bo grasp for power by praising a movement that killed his own mother?

Hu Deping honed in on the need to forge mechanisms to institutionalize the power games between party leaders. He told his princeling and intellectual friends in the seminar audience that the remnants of feudal aristocracy -- old fashioned despotic power -- might again emerge as the party had said it had during the Cultural Revolution. He foreshadowed the ructions that are now taking place:

"If we really want to carry out democratization of inner-party political life, the cost is going to be enormous. Do we have the courage to accept that cost? If we do it now, there is a cost certainly. Do we dare to bear the cost? Is now the right time? I cannot say for sure. However, I think it might create some 'chaos' in some localities, some temporary 'chaos', and some localized 'chaos'. We should be prepared."

Hu Deping has been stepping forward, with some reluctance, to draw on his father's legacy to help shape China's future. He is a member of the standing committee of one of China's two representative-style bodies and mixes with senior leaders. He discussed the Cultural Revolution with both President Hu Jintao and his expected successor, Xi Jinping, not long before Wen Jiabao's news conference and Bo Xilai's demise, according to a source familiar with those conversations. China's politically engaged population is watching the battle now under way within the Politburo to frame the downfall of Bo Xilai and set the lessons that will shape China's future.

"So far we cannot identify whether Wen Jiabao is representing himself or representing a group," says a recently
retired minister-level official, who had confidently predicted Bo's sacking to me 10 days before it happened. "Maybe it's 80 percent himself and 20 percent the group. We still have to watch."

It remains far from clear whether the Communist Party’s webs of patronage and knots of financial and bureaucratic interests can be reformed. But with China's leftist movement decapitated by the purge of Bo Xilai, and Bo's critics now talking about his reign of "red terror" after daily revelations of political and physical brutality under his command, Wen has begun to win over some of his many detractors.

"In the past I did not have a fully positive view of Wen Jiabao, because he said a lot of things but didn't deliver," says a leading media figure with lifelong connections to China's leadership circle. "Now I realize just to be able to say it, that's important. To speak up, let the whole world know that he could not achieve anything because he was strangled by the system."

Hu Yaobang’s most faithful protégé, who carried his funeral casket to its final resting place, is building on the groundwork laid by Hu and his children ostensibly to prevent a return of the Cultural Revolution. Wen Jiabao is defending the party line set by Deng Xiaoping’s 1981 historical resolution against attack from the left. Between the lines, however, he is challenging the Communist Party’s 30-year consensus from the liberal right.

Hu Dehua, the youngest son, spelled out the gulf between these positions in a rare Chinese media interview one month ago: "The difference between my father and Deng is this: Deng wanted to save the party; my father wanted to save the people, the ordinary people."

Wen Jiabao sees Bo's downfall as a pivotal opportunity to pin his reformist colors high while the Communist Party is too divided to rein him in. He is reaching out to the Chinese public because the party is losing its monopoly on truth and internal roads to reform have long been blocked. Ironically, he is doing so by leading the public purging of a victim who has no hope of transparent justice, because the party to which he has devoted his life has never known any other way.

John Garnaut is China correspondent for the Sydney Morning Herald and the Age. He is writing a book on the princelings shaping China's future.

Photo: Hu Yaobang (white coat), with Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao to the right, during a February 1986 inspection tour to Guizhou.
Welcome to Foreign Policy's new commenting system! The good news is that it's now easier than ever to comment and share your insights with friends. Here's how it works: You can now sign in using Twitter, Facebook, or LiveFyre accounts (which will replace the ForeignPolicy.com accounts from now on), Tweet or post your comment to Facebook, and carry on a conversation with your fellow commenters in the section below. For more information, click here.

BizTrends
For those who are skeptical, you will note that the author of this article is relying heavily on input from the family of Hu Yaobang (which is acknowledged at the foot of the article with the words "Courtesy of Hu Yaobang family"), who are in close touch with Wen and all priceplings in Beijing. They know what is going on. They discuss it daily. This article also aligns with my own inside knowledge of what is the situation within the Party, from my own sources, none of whom are connected with the pricelings, though they are with Wen. (Frank Feather)

1 HOUR AGO

TonyChopkoski
Well, it is a start on understanding things and certainly, the praise of criticism is a certain giveaway for raw nerves exposed.

2 HOURS AGO

xinglongnite
Never before seen an FP article about China this good.

6 HOURS AGO

OcastJournalist
This is a typical John Garnaut style article. The feeling is like reading a novel whereby John appears to enjoy a direct and intimate personal contact within the highest level of the Communist Party's leaderships. However, John way of present his story has definitely improved a lot in this article after I last challenged him on the factual reliability of some of his previous stories on the Age Newspaper about China and Premier Wen in 2010. Before I touch on the story of my encountered with Mr. Garnaut in 2010 about the reliability of a number of his stories, and how he has responded to my complaints to the Ages Newspaper and then the Australia Press Council, I would like to point out that, this is the first time, I see so many links provided in John article. However, when I take the trouble to examine those links, I find that many of those links he provided did not tell his story, despite in his article, there are a lot of "QUOTEs" directly or indirectly before and after those links.

Just to name a few examples:

Example 1: First paragraph: "critics allege" (This is the link: http://www.cnngo.com/hong-kong/banned-book-sale-hong-kong-grandpa-wen-criticised-chinas-best-actor-122787), this link to a 2010 news about a book on Wen, nothing was mentioned about the story of Premier Wen nailing the coffin of his great rival Bo Xilai in 2012. Besides, the recent problem with Bo Xilai is not created by Premier Wen, it is his own making relating to corruption within his family members. In addition, if there is any rivalry, it should be between the incoming leader Xi Jinping and Bo Xilai, nothing got to do with the outgoing Wen.

Examples 2: Paragraph 2: "Bo's political execution" (This is the link: http://www.economist.com/node/21550309). Again, the content on this link did not mention anything that follow John story line such as "... He framed the struggle over Bo’s legacy as a choice between urgent political reforms and "such historical tragedies as the Cultural Revolution ..."; In fact that link tell the story that "Mr Bo’s downfall was precipitated by the flight to an American consulate of Wang Lijun." However, that report in the Economist did mention about Wen "public
ticking-off for the Chongqing leadership at a press conference" the day before Bo Xilai is arrested. The irony with some western media is that, journalist or writer alike love to use their bias and prejudice to add negative comment or story to everything that happens in China. Premier Wen as a leader of the nation when facing question from journalist about such an incident, there is no reason for him to shut his mouth and then wait for the arrest to take place the following day. It is a healthy thing that a high ranking bureaucrat been arrested when corruption is found. Don't John agree?

Example 3: Paragraph 2: 2nd hyperlink: "ideological heirs" (This is the link: http://cmp.hku.hk/2012/03/15/20395/). Again, the statement made by Premier Wen is still related to question posted by Journalists in a press conference. There is nothing in Wen's words that supported John statement: "In Wen's world, bringing down Bo is the first step in a battle between China's Maoist past and a more democratic future as personified by his beloved mentor, 1980s Communist Party chief Hu Yaobang. His words blew open the facade of party unity that had held since the massacres of Tiananmen Square." In fact, that article is merely the personal opinion of the author Hu Shuli as stated at the end of the article by the editorial term.

I did take the trouble to go through more links provided by John and cross reference with the statement he made before and after those links and the results are very similar to the above three examples. I do not want to bore readers by providing more examples. However, I would like readers to examine the following incidents taken place in 2010 when I challenged John Garnaut on a number of stories he wrote about China: The links are as follows:


Article 2: Media Accountability—The Age must say 'Sorry' to Australians (24 May 2010): [http://outcastjournalist.com/index_files/media_accountability_the_age_must_say_sorry_to_australian.htm]

Note: This article come with the content of John Garnaut email reply.

Article 3: More Dodgy Materials Exposed - The Age and John Garnaut Case Continue (14 June 2010) [http://outcastjournalist.com/index_files/more Dodgy materials_exposed_the_age_n john_garnaut_case_cont.htm]

Note: This article publish the contents of two more John Garnaut e-mail reply.


Continue...

OcastJournalist
continue from above:

Article 4: This article is about the 2009/2010 Rio Tinto Bribery case: [http://outcastjournalist.com/index_files/the_brutal_truth_about_rio_tinto_bribery_case.htm], you will notice from the article how the Australian media running a smear campaign against China for a period of 9 months leading up to the Australian executive pledging guilty in the Chinese court with the present of the Australian diplomat and disputed only the amount of money involved. You will find that, three of the reports that linked China top leadership to the case were written by John Gurnaut:

For examples: the following examples are a direct abstract from what I wrote in that article relating to John 3 reports:

Again, Sydney Morning Herald (7 Nov 2009) under the heading ‘Exposed: the man controlling Stern Hu's fate’, speculating without quoting any source that “Wu Zhiming, who is due to decide his (Stern Hu) fate within 10 days”. Follow by an unnamed source: “But some Chinese lawyers say the justice system is more tightly controlled in Shanghai because it has been the stable, long-time power base of Jiang Zemin.”, then another unnamed statement: “Some say Wu has a tighter grip on Shanghai than even the mayor or Communist Party secretary”. Then “The President, Hu Jintao, and a host of lesser players might also vie for influence” (not quoting any source again), then “political analysts (unnamed) say there is a risk that Rio Tinto’s iron ore team will - or might already have - become stuck in the middle of a bitter struggle between President Hu and Jiang.” [link: http://www.smh.com.au/business/exposed-the-man-controlling-stern-hu-fate-20091106-i23w.html ]

This is my remark: "How wonderful to be a mainstream media journalist. You can say whatever you like without quoting any sources”.

On 11 Feb 2010, The Age made a further speculation under the heading ‘China steps up Stern Hu bribe case’, again, using the technique of quoting an (unnamed) observer: “Observers say the decision is likely to have been made at the highest level of Chinese politics,” follow by this statement: “Some had expected President Hu Jintao's visit last month to Shanghai - the territory of his political rivals and his first visit in two years - would lead to the case being resolved in Mr Hu's favour.” [ http://www.theage.com.au/business/china-steps-up-stern-hu-bribe-case-20100211-nsnt.html ]

All the above three report about Chinese top leaders personally involved in Rio case are the work of John Garnaut. You may read my full analysis at: http://outcastjournalist.com/index_files/the_brutal_truth_about_rio_tinto_bribery_case.htm.

I would urge that readers to cross reference every statement John made in any of his article or report before accepting them as facts.

Written by Wei Ling Chua
www.outcastjournalist.com

The_Observer
OcastJournalist
A very interesting critique of the article and author.

godfree1
Since Mr. Garnaut is privileged to partipate in Central Committee meetings, and is privy to Premier Wen's innermost thoughts, I shall not attempt to refute his account of the high-level goings on in China. But as an admistted outsider, I was struck by Mr.Garnaut's assertion (much more easily fact-checked) that the "Chinese Communist Party is crumbling under the weight of inequality, corruption, and mistrust". Because it isn't, as Mr. Garnaut and his editors must know. Deng himself warned the Chinese that they would have to suffer through a period during some got rich before others. And that 'suffering' is no worse than the USA is currently enduring, and far less than the people of India are accustomed to. More importantly, as of this year, all provinces must begin reporting their GINI indices and increasing weight will be given to
progress in this area (along with provision of low-income housing) in promotions. As to corruption, China has suffered from it for at least 3,000 years and there is probably less of it today than at any time in the country's proud history. The senior committee is probably the most honest government on earth, as their results demonstrate. The incoming President, Mr. Xi, is notorious for his remarkable honesty, as were all his predecessors. Which brings us to Mr. Garnaut's third charge: trust. People don't trust crooks, which is why only 9% of Americans trust Congress. But 85-90% of Chinese trust the Party (Pew, Edelman) and support its policies and practices. If Mr. Garnaut could tear himself away from those interminable Steering Committee meetings and check his facts he might be surprised.

Magratheazaphod

this is a little over the top. there is definitely a sense among ordinary Chinese people that China is reaching some kind of a turning point, fueled by very public scandals such as the burning of the Wenzhou train accident and increasing tales of official corruption. A claim that 85-90% of people “trust” the party has to be viewed with considerable skepticism.

tristan_mcinnis

Agree with Magratheazaphod. I think a lot of party support comes from the countryside where the rural reforms have done a lot in recent years to raise the standard of living. Just look at the tax reforms and health care initiatives that improve the social safety net. They have a lot more to gain from what seem like small luxuries compared to those in the cities who, if they have the hukou, may be looking for more robust and transparent type of governance.

godfree1

@Magratheazaphod Check Pew and Edelman. And those surveys were carried out in urban areas. They're annual, and results have been consistent for years.

dom_m

Read the article carefully before you criticise it Godfree. Garnaut didn't assert that the "Chinese Communist Party is crumbling under the weight of inequality corruption, and mistrust" at all, despite your assertion. He attributes that belief to Wen Jiabao and Bo Xilai.

godfree1

@dom_m Yes, which is why I was ribbing him. He poses as someone who knows what senior Committee members ‘believe’. His stock in trade is attributing thoughts and motives to people he doesn't know.

dom_m

Wen and Bo are on the record with those beliefs. Its not like Garnaut is pretending to some degree of telepathy.

tristan_mcinnis

Absolutely fantastic article... Not many people mention the Wen angle in this debate with such depth. Love it.

The_Observer

This has got to be one of the more interesting articles on China in FP for a long time. It's well written and objective in tone. I shall seek out the author's book for more background.
Conversation from Twitter

griverorz  from Twitter
@mgilib Perfecto. Muchas gracias.
2 HOURS AGO

DanSWright  from Twitter
@pkedrosky ... the Maoist hardliners are more prone to aristocracy, odd given Mao though the concept of "family" was obsolete. #Irony #China
3 HOURS AGO

CloseDanger  from Twitter
RT @FP_Magazine: The incredible story of the 30-year family feud that caused China's shocking leadership shake-up http://t.co/sSLBuDoF
3 HOURS AGO

deaarchitect  from Twitter
@pkedrosky I was recently with someone who has done biz in China for a while & he mentioned how little we hear in US of their pol turmoil
3 HOURS AGO

mtwirth  from Twitter
@goldkorn You didn't single out the Gamaut! #TwitterChinaHandTribunalLooming
14 HOURS AGO

[Image]
goldkorn  from Twitter
@mtwirth Bring it on!
13 HOURS AGO

[Image] mtwirth  from Twitter
@goldkorn Nah. I'm only a TwitterChinaHand fan boy ;)
13 HOURS AGO

caspertherorst  from Twitter
@christinelu amazing these stories.
16 HOURS AGO

PPAbrego  from Twitter
@stefangeens Even though Gamaut's words are somewhat dramatic and emotional, they're a good hype for the 2012 shift in power. Thanks!
17 HOURS AGO

[Image] uponsnow  from Twitter
这标题好 RT @LeonSYC 天线的逆袭 RT @hnjhj: http://t.co/bE3RxPy7
17 HOURS AGO

[Image] MariaSelba  from Twitter
@FP_Magazine #Bahrain Centre for Human Rights wins Index on Censorship Advocacy Award ...: http://t.co/tIU8A3yA
20 HOURS AGO

[Image] hussamaha  from Twitter
@blakehounshell very nice article
21 HOURS AGO