

Understanding Hu Jintao

Hu Jintao started his political ascent at the top leadership of the Communist Party of China by managing the repression of the demonstrations which took place in Lhasa, Tibet in 1989¹. He was selected as Head of the Party in Tibet due to his reputation as “reformer”. After his relations with Jiang Nanxiang, his first supporter in the CCP hierarchy, he was appointed as instructor at the Party School of the Tsinghua University. After the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” which started in 1967, Hu Jintao was sent to the Gansu province for one year and was subsequently assigned to No. 813 Sub-Bureau, Fourth Engineering Bureau, Ministry for Water Conservancy, in charge of water resources and electric energy production. In 1974 he was transferred from the Gansu province to the capital city, Lanzhou, where he was selected for a career in the Party by Song Ping² who, from Gansu was promoted to the Central Planning

¹ See The Heritage Foundation, *Who's Hu? Assessing China's Heir Apparent, Hu Jintao*, John Tkacik, April 19, 2002

² For Hu Jintao's political biography, see Andy Zhang, *Hu Jintao: Facing China's Challenges Ahead*, New York, Writers' Club Press, 2002

Commission in Beijing. Therefore, in 1982, Hu Jintao was selected as substitute member at the CCP 17th Central Committee. Two years later he became Secretary of the Communist Youth League from which in 1985 - after many internal fights - Hu Jintao was transferred by the Party's General Secretary, Hu Yaobang, to Guizhou, as General Secretary of the Party's provincial committee. Hu Yaobang was the "hard" line leader and, after a CCP mission to the poor region where Hu was Party's provincial secretary, he sent to Beijing little gratifying notes on the local work carried out by the "reformer" Hu.

Three years later, Song Ping, his mentor and point of reference in Beijing, informed Hu Jintao of the fact that the CCP was looking for a leader to preside over the Secretariat of the Tibet Autonomous Regional Committee³, an appointment which was entrusted to Hu Jintao in August 1988. Immediately mass demonstrations took place in Lhasa which - even though Hu Jintao coordinated the arrival of seventeen divisions of the Chinese People's Liberation Army - lasted until the subsequent March, when

³ On the relationship between Hu Jintao and the CCP leadership see the book by Peter Yu Kien Hong, *Hu Jintao and the Ascendancy of China, a Dialectical Study*, Singapore, Times Academic Press, 2005

on the 7th of that same month the CCP General Secretary, Li Peng, proclaimed the martial law in Tibet. This - *inter alia* - kept the Lhasa region isolated from the great rebellion, which culminated in the Tiananmen Square massacre.

Hu Jintao returned to Beijing where, in the spring of 1992, Deng Xiaoping entrusted him with the task of organizing the CCP 14th National Congress, the first Congress which saw Jiang Zemin as General Secretary⁴.

It was the time when Hu Jintao's policy was characterized by the fight against nepotism and the setting of clear quality standards for being promoted to political assignments and posts. In March 1993 Hu was finally appointed director of the Central Party School where - upon Hu Jintao's initiative - modern economics and finance were taught, over and above Marxist theories. While attempting a possible synthesis between Marxism and modernization, Hu Jintao started a wide internal discussion on the rift between the people and the Party, with a book "for internal use" where evidence was provided that more than one third of Chinese intellectuals

⁴ See David Bachman, *The Fourteenth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, November 1992*, New York, Westview Press, 1992

thought that the CCP should “call free elections” and that most Chinese “deemed that the CCP was in the hands of corrupt officials”⁵.

He also created a centre of International Policy and Comparative Policy within the Central Party School.

In October 1997⁶, when the preparatory work for the CCP 15th National Congress started, Hu was China’s “fifth most powerful executive” and one day later he became China’s Vice-President. Jiang Zemin justified his choice on the basis of Hu Jintao’s “economic experience” and the effectiveness of his Party leadership in Tibet.

In May of that same year Hu Jintao projected himself as the leader of reformers within the Party in a speech on the occasion of the celebration for the 20th anniversary of Deng Xiaoping’s Reforms.

Considering that the Chinese economic reform is hinged around a careful analysis of the factors determining its foreign policy, as vice-President of the CCP Central Military Commission, Hu Jintao travelled to ASEAN countries and managed the

⁵ For these CCP internal “campaigns” see the book edited by various authors., *The Chinese Communist Party in Reform*, London, Routledge, 2006

⁶ W.K. Lau, *15th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party: Milestone in China’s Privatization “Capital & Class”*, 1999.

Chinese dossiers on Japan and the Southern Pacific region - which were key elements of the geopolitical and economic link between China and its target markets - and controlled the operations for Hong Kong integration into the motherland, which took place in 1997⁷ - the military and economic “safety belt” of Chinese globalization.

Hu Jintao succeeded Jiang Zemin as Party General Secretary in November 2002 and as President of the Central Military Commission in September 2004: with him - along Deng Xiaoping’s policy line - a generation of Chinese executives rose to power, who was no longer selected in the summer meetings held in the Beidaihe seaside retreats, but rather thanks to the general verification of political stances and *leadership* styles.

In the framework of foreign policy, Hu Jintao loyally followed Deng Xiaoping’s guideline to “keep a low profile though strengthening one’s own positions”⁸.

⁷ See W. Van Kemenade, *China, Hong Kong, Taiwan Inc. The Dynamics of a New Empire*, New York, Vintage Books, 1998.

⁸ Deng’s axiom was precisely: “observe calmly, stand firmly, respond carefully, hide one’s ability to buy time and do whatever necessary”, in James Tang, *With the Grain or against the Grain? Energy Security and Chinese Foreign Policy in the Hu Jintao Era*, The Brookings Institution, October 2006

This is probably the key to understand the geopolitical significance - over and above the meaning “for internal use” - of the “Theory of the Three Harmonies” that Hu Jintao proposed as a theoretical and propaganda model, which was enshrined in the CCP Statute at the end of its 17th National Congress that witnessed the stabilization - both at central and local levels - of the Hu Jintao-Wen Jabao pair⁹.

The “Three Harmonies” were “seeking peace in the world, reconciliation with Taiwan and harmony in Chinese society”. Hu Jintao e Wen Jabao - after Jiang Zemin’s theory of the “Three Represents” (“the CCP “represents” the highest level of productivity, the foremost culture and the people’s interests”), which was the paradigm with which the CCP welcomed the “new class” of cadre-entrepreneurs in its ranks - wanted to rebalance the Party’s representation also to the benefit of those people who, in the Chinese society, were on the sidelines of economic innovation and globalization.

⁹ With a view to understanding the CCP XVII Congress of 2007 see the official documents on the website www.china.org.cn/english/congress/225438.htm and the book by Cheng Li, *China’s Leadership, Fifth Generation*, Brookings Institution, May 1, 2008

With the “Three Harmonies” theory Hu Jintao wanted to prevent the strong social differences which had emerged in the Chinese society of the time - especially in rural areas and large urban outskirts - from hindering steady and stable Chinese economic growth or tarnishing the image of China as a peaceful and stable country.

In this case Hu Jintao’s specific reference was to the slogans and policy line of his predecessor as Secretary of Young Communists, Hu Yaobang, who in the early 1980s had devised the “Theory of the Three Tolerances”: leniency, generosity and tolerance¹⁰.

In other words, with his theory Hu Jintao intended to carry out a *soft power* policy to prevent the repression of those “dissatisfied with globalization” in China from destabilizing the CCP growth and effectiveness, leaving free hand to the conservative faction, possibly allied with Jiang Zemin’s modernizing “thrust”.

The picture can be further clarified if we look at the modernization of the Chinese armed forces led by Hu Jintao over the last three years.

¹⁰ Willi Lam, *Hu Jintao’s Theory of the Three Harmonies*”, China Brief, The Jamestown Foundation, www.jamestown.org, 30 April 2008

The military Modernization was the last of the Four Modernizations proposed by Deng Xiaoping at the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee held in December 1978.

If the armed forces were modernized along the lines set by Deng, thus improving their technological level and their C5IEW strategies, in Hu's opinion it would be possible to retain such a level of regional and global credibility so as to avoid the evident attrition at the Chinese borders; conversely if the armed forces became tools for future internal repression, the CCP could rapidly lose control of situation¹¹.

Furthermore, if - as reported by some Western analysts on the basis of internal sources close to the Chinese power elite - Hu Jintao is in a minority position in the Politburo, but in a majority position in the Central Committee, the "Three Harmonies" policy also implies a stabilization of political balances at the CCP top leadership, without structural shocks in the Chinese economy and society which may lead to a destructive fight between factions, but

¹¹ *Hu Jintao on opening up new Vistas for the Modernization of National Defense and the Defense Forces*, New China News Agency, March 2005, search in www.xinhua.org

particularly ruinous for China's economic projection abroad¹².

The "Three Represents" meant a specific effort, which culminated in Jiang Zemin's speech for the 80th anniversary of the CCP foundation, in July 2001, to incorporate the private enterprise in the Party's ranks and policies.

Nevertheless, this did not mean that the CCP intended to adopt a large-scale privatization program; however, the ability shown by the Chinese Communist Party to integrate private entrepreneurs into Maoist China's *ideological* mechanism and the presence of "capitalist" entrepreneurs in the Party's ranks were very limited, especially in peripheral areas¹³.

Hu Jintao's China underwent a process to readjust to this prospect, namely a Modernization (the second one in Deng Xiaoping's approach) of the industrial economy which upset the relationship of simultaneity (which existed in Deng's speech) between the updating of the business system and the other Modernizations,

¹² Roderick McFarquhar, *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: Chinese Leadership, Politics and Policy*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 22nd 2005, www.carnegieendowment.org

¹³ Jia Hepeng, *The Three Represents campaign, reform the party or indoctrinate the capitalists?* In "Cato Journal", vol. 24, n. 3, Fall 2004 search in www.cato.org

especially the First (Agriculture) and the Fourth (the Armed Forces).

The debate on neoliberalism held in Chinese universities and within the Party in 2003-2004¹⁴ enabled Hu Jintao to clarify his ideas on the relationship between economic reform and the CCP social control. In a speech he delivered at the CCP Plenum of September 19, 2004, Hu stated: “For some time enemy forces abroad attacked our leadership and our political system. And our national media flew the flag of structural political reform to disseminate the Western-style parliamentary democracy, human rights and freedom of the press. The enemy forces inevitably viewed the Chinese public as the first target to be attacked.... The old Soviet Union fell under the assault of Westernization and middle class liberalizations”¹⁵.

In other words, this meant that the polemics of the CCP “new Left” - that defined the debate on “neoliberalism” - was targeted against Jiang Zemin and his “Three Represents” policy, which led to clearly define the ownership rights and sell some

¹⁴ “Rethink the Approach to State Enterprises Reform to Prevent Loss of State Assets and Revitalize State Enterprises”, Trans FBIS CPP-2004-0924-000221

¹⁵ See the magazine “Kaifang” published in Hong Kong, www.kaifang.org

of the most inefficient state-owned companies and mainly enriched a small group of CCP executives - leaders outside the “Fifth Generation” circles (Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao, Zheng Qinghong, Li Changchun Luo gan) who had rose to power during the “Three Represents” phase.

Some aspects of this criticism were accepted by Hu Jintao, which integrated them into his *soft power* operation of the “Three Harmonies”. However, the CCP “new Left” also wanted greater participation into the Party internal political life and this was not easily granted by Hu Jintao.

Conversely, the CCP Fourth Plenum and the decision to quench the debate on the relationship between “bourgeois freedoms” and globalization showed that Hu Jintao desired to manage the CCP crisis and its possible weakening in managing society by means of a inner-Party reform, without basically altering the relationship between the CCP and Society¹⁶.

This was the line which characterized the “White Paper” on the Chinese political system, published

¹⁶ V. Joseph Fewsmith, *China under Hu Jintao*, China Leadership Monitor, no. 14 search www.hoover.org

by the Information Office of the Chinese Council of State¹⁷.

It is a “party political ideology” which is essential in the CCP logic that which defines the “affluent society” for 2020 and is proposed - in the White Paper - along the lines of Hu Jintao’s contributions on the occasion of the 17th CCP National Congress.

Hu Jintao stated that the spirit prevailing in current China is along the lines of “socialist democracy”.

To put in Hu’s words, “the socialist democracy has continued to develop and remarkable success has been recorded in fostering democracy and the proper enforcement of laws”. Hu Jintao’s ideological system to examine the Chinese political is the system he has defined as the “scientific analysis of Development”, which - at organizational level - presupposes “socialist democracy”, “people’s democracy” and “political restructuring”.

In Western terms, this means that Hu Jintao intends to strengthen the CCP economic role; foster the autonomous representation activities

¹⁷ See www.china.org.cn

carried out by the Party in the places where people work and study and especially reform the CCP by using and channelling these forces that he can muster and organize outside the various Party currents¹⁸.

The central argument - which well supports Hu Jintao's projects - is that the Chinese "multi-party cooperation" has set a new original and unique kind of democracy in the world. It is well-known that there exists eight parties in China under the CCP leadership: the "Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang", the "China Democratic League", the "China Democratic National Construction Association", the "China Association for promoting Democracy", the "Chinese Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party", the "China Zhi Gong Dang" (Party for Public Interest), the "Jiu Shan Society" (September 3rd Society) and the "Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League".

In other terms, it is thought that - thanks to this project - Hu intends to put pressures on the Party, by struggling free of the right-left internal vicelike grip and mobilizing the various

¹⁸ IDSA, Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses, Raviprasad Naranayan, *White Paper on China's Political System*, search www.idsa.in

organizations, which accept the CCP hegemony as “personal parties” and current parties – a sort of encirclement tactic along Sun Tzu’s best tradition.

This is the context where Hu Jintao tries to control the CCP internal crisis, which is occurring in this period.

The policy line pursued by Hu – who is supported by Wen Jiabao in this operation – is designed to readjust the whole propaganda model that his aides have defined in the 2003-2005 period. It is a model that we have already studied and which is based on retrieving the “socialist” myth of fighting against corruption – suffice to recall the polemic against the leaders who “have only money in mind, instead of Marxism-Leninism”¹⁹ and Hu Jintao’s statement that “the CCP leaders must raise their consciousness of living in difficult times”²⁰, and that finally the CCP must follow a “socialist democracy” line to enable cadres to “understand and develop the new advanced nature of Communism”²¹.

¹⁹ *Qiushi*, “Seeking truth”, newspaper, April 12, 2008, in JPRS Report, Foreign Broadcast Information Office, April 30, 2008

²⁰ Xinhua, in www.xinhua.org March 9, 2008

²¹ Xinhua, April 12, 2008, www.xinhua.org

In other words, for Hu Jintao the issue lies in building a new ideological configuration for the CCP leadership, which can allow homogeneous behaviours within the Party, without overburdening the internal anti-corruption control bodies. It is a Marxist-Leninist *soft power* strategy to combat the CCP leaders' autonomism and the consequent corruption which - in Maoist terms - is seen as "subjectivist deviation" and "small-bourgeois residues".

The latest indoctrination sessions for cadres - organized directly by Hu Jintao - have centered on the so-called "education about the Three Consciousnesses"²².

This a reference to Hu's dictum that party cadres and members must raise "their consciousness of living in difficult times, their sense of duty as public servants and the virtue of thriftiness".

In other words, Hu Jintao intends to recover the time and logical sequence of Deng Xiaoping's "Four Modernizations", by balancing the second Modernization, namely the economic one, with the first Modernization (the agricultural one, which ended with the destruction of Maoist

²² Willi Lam, *Hu Jintao battles the CCP's Crisis of Confidence*, Jamestown Foundation, China Brief, 30 April 2008, www.jamestown.org

inefficient “communes”) and defining the third Modernization, namely science and technology, as a Party’s essential battlefield to avoid the creation of an economy based on political “rentiers”, who become those who grant aid and foreign investment for low value-added - and hence necessarily low-wage - technologies.

The momentum provided by Hu Jintao and his team to the careful study of the ideological organization of a number of European socialist democratic parties by the Party’s academic bodies must be viewed in this context .

This could lead to the integration of individual elements of the European social-democratic logics into the CCP organization machinery²³.

In other words, China is organizing itself to *manage ongoing development also in a stage of world crisis* and does not intend to indefinitely retain its role as global pole of attraction for the E.U. and U.S smokestack industries, lameducks or insolvent companies.

In this project followed by Hu Jintao, the issue lies in reducing the “cost of politics”, namely the legal or illegal cost that the CCP bureaucracies

²³ Xinhua, March 8, 2008, www.xinhua.org

absorb in planning China's economic integration into the market-world²⁴.

This is exactly the purpose served by the “social-democratic hypothesis”. In Hu Jintao's opinion, the European socialist democracies have succeeded in organizing control over the leading macro-economic functions (wages, public spending, welfare, technological innovation, monetary exchanges) by managing the core of politics, government and representative assemblies, by delegating to the other social bodies (companies, trade unions, parties, associations) the micro-economic negotiations on the distribution and allocation of public spending and wages)²⁵.

The party conceived by Hu Jintao is more oligarchic and less linked to direct control over economic transactions (which is now a source of cadres' endemic corruption), as well as more capable of managing global operations with a streamlined and reliable techno-structure.

Better less but better, to use a classic slogan coined by Lenin²⁶.

²⁴ Albert Keidel, *The Limits of a smaller, poorer, China*, The Financial Times, November 14, 2007

²⁵ E. Bernstein, *The Preconditions of Socialism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993

²⁶ Lenin, *Better less but better - Writings for the 12th RCP Congress (b) of 1923* Complete works, Rome, Editori Riuniti, 1972

As we have already seen, in order to do so Hu Jintao needs to have the Party's strong control over the media with a view to avoiding the massification of internal factionism and the creation of real "organized currents"²⁷.

This is a mechanism which has developed precisely after the 17th Party National Congress: Hu Jintao's line attaches priority to the CCP "political reform" (epitomized by the Congress slogan of "Socialism with Chinese characteristics"), but the CCP structure is hard to change. After all, today the CCP leaders' image has much to do with the Italian polemical debate on the so-called "caste".

In the relationship between central and peripheral areas, Hu must implement the centralized mechanism which has been formulated in the 17th Party National Congress, but must look for a formally different political system to exert leverage on the party - often discredited - to reunite it and reduce both factionism (China's structural evil from the

²⁷ In this regard see the impact of the book *Gongjian, a Report on Political Reform in China after the 17th Congress*, which had a limited spreading among leaders and executives and proposes a "media supervision by the public" see CHINA MEDIA PROJECT, <http://www.cmp.hku.hk>

T'ang Dynasty until today) and corruption, which weakens the CCP hold on civil society²⁸.

The whole Hu Jintao's ideological system is designed to solve this *puzzle* and - as was the case with the references to Lenin in Gorbachev's Russia - the ever more frequent references made by the press to Deng Xiaoping's ideology are implicit polemics against corruption and "bourgeois subjectivism", as well as a request for greater probity within the Communist Party.

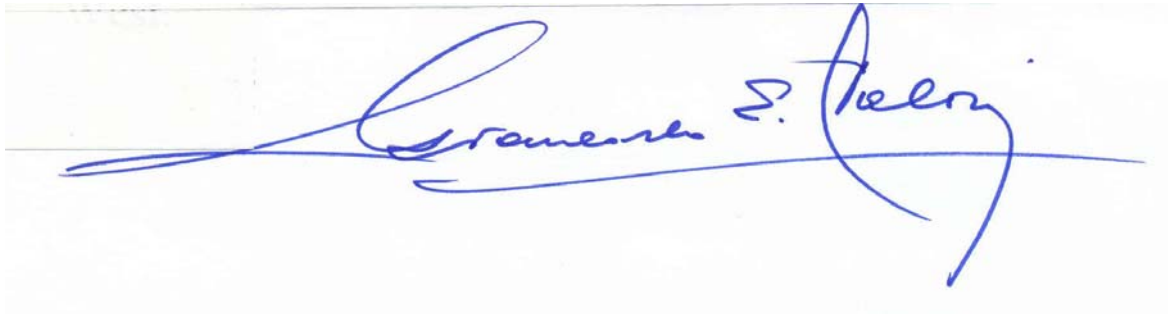
In the former Soviet Union's case, the reference made to Lenin's purity was the sign of a political project, which led to the collapse and break-up of Communist Russia and the prevailing of neoliberalism, with often overtly paracriminal traits²⁹. In the case of Hu Jintao's China the reference to the "Four Modernizations" and the ethics of the "Three Consciences" should lead China to retain national unity and autonomy and reject neoliberalism since, in Hu's opinion, it would inevitably marginalize China vis-à-vis the

²⁸ China Elections & Governance, *The Road Ahead: assessing CCP's 17° Congress*, Yawei Lie, www.chinaelections.org

²⁹ See Marco Giaconi, *Le Organizzazioni Criminali Internazionali - Aspetti geostrategici e economici (International Criminal Organizations - Geostrategic and Economic Aspects)*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, CEMiSS, 2001

group of countries which are currently winning the globalization race.

The “democratic socialism” pursued by Hu Jintao and his so-far reliable ally, Wen Jiabao - combined with the Four Modernizations - serves this purpose.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Wen Jiabao". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left and a large loop on the right.