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BETWEEN *TAIZIDANG* AND *TUANPAI*: What's next for China's succession crisis?

Seán Golden, Senior Research Fellow associate, CIDOB

Both the United States and the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) are facing succession crises in the autumn of 2012. One will be resolved by democratic elections, the other by democratic centralism. In both cases short-term and long-term strategies are at stake. In the short term, jockeying for power promotes radical rhetoric for immediate domestic consumption and political gain, even though this rhetoric could be counterproductive for any effective long-term strategy in a globalised economy. Beyond the short-term, radically different ideological models are in conflict in both cases. In the US, a right-wing coalition of Christian fundamentalists and wealthy people who see no danger in restricting scientific research, social entitlement and civil empowerment, nor in eliminating the middle class, are seeking to dismantle the limited amount of social guarantees that were begun by the New Deal in the 1930's, while an incumbent President whose re-election is uncertain is trying to defend them. In the PRC, a reform programme based on liberalising the economy in order to generate wealth efficiently faces resistance from forces, inside and outside of the Party, that defend the redistribution of wealth in order to guarantee social equity and State-centred control of the economy and the country.

The power struggle taking place within the Party-State in the run-up to the renovation of its leadership in the 18th Chinese Communist Party National Congress next October, when the "fifth generation" of leaders (Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang) will replace the current generation (Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao), has become visible as a result of the purging of Bo Xilai. The shock of Bo's downfall has been called the most significant political event in China since 1989 and has been compared to the shock caused by the Lin Biao scandal in 1971. Lin was denounced for plotting to overthrow Mao Zedong, who had named Lin his chosen successor. Lin was portrayed as corrupt and venal. Ideology was not associated with his actions. Now Bo is being portrayed as corrupt and ruthless. His wife is accused of conspiracy to murder and his son has been criticised for leading the life of a wealthy playboy. Ideology has been eliminated from the criticism of Bo Xilai by the official discourse on the matter, but the Bo Xilai scandal has strong ideological implications. The problem for observers and analysts is how to interpret these implications.

Succession is one of the oldest and most basic conundrums of Chinese political thought and practice. The Confucian tradition praised the ancient sage kings who

passed over their own sons in order to name morally good men to succeed them and criticised the practice of keeping the control of power within the family. This principle was enshrined in the meritocratic system of the imperial exams that co-opted the best minds of each generation into the centralised bureaucracy. Today the two most significant factions within the Party-State are the children of veterans of the revolution, the 太子黨 *taizidang* or “princeling faction”, and the 團派 *tuanpai* or “League faction”. The princelings have enjoyed privileged access to power and wealth because of their family connections. The cadres who rose through the Communist Youth League have achieved their current status through a screening process based on their performance records (as well as their access to patronage). Some leaders combine both characteristics. The leading candidate to head the fifth generation, Xi Jinping, is *taizidang*, while the probable number two, Li Keqiang, is *tuanpai*.

Both Bo Xilai and his wife are princelings. Bo was an agile, charismatic and populist politician who used Maoist slogans to preach social justice and gain popular support in subtle but apparent opposition to the liberalising policies of the main leadership. He was also ruthless, abrasive and authoritarian. He spied on the Party leaders and used rough arm tactics to control criminals, businessmen and rivals. He seemed destined to become a member of the new Standing Committee of the next Politburo but now he has fallen, and with him a “leftist” opposition to the “neoliberal” reformists.

Wen Jiabao, his nemesis, who is not a princeling, denounced Bo for trying to bring back the Cultural Revolution, an event perceived by Party veterans as an attempt to destroy the Party by mobilising popular support outside the framework of Party discipline. Wen is the son of a school teacher. His parents were persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. Bo and his father were imprisoned by Red Guards who killed his mother or drove her to suicide. Wen’s mentor was Hu Yaobang, Deng Xiaping’s first chosen successor. When Hu was ousted from power in 1987, by Bo’s father, among others, he was succeeded by Zhao Ziyang, who fell in 1989. Wen worked closely with both of them, and has tried to rehabilitate the name of Hu Yaobang. Some suggest revenge as a motive for Bo’s downfall. Wen is also a charismatic and popular politician, referred to by the people as “Grandfather” Wen, and he has used the media to garner popular support ahead of the coming change in the leadership to promote the need for political reforms, reviving the agenda of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang that was shelved in 1989.

For analysts who favour guaranteeing social equity as the fundamental role of a Soviet-style Party that has renounced centralised planning of the economy in favour of market force efficiency, the purge of Bo Xilai seems suspiciously convenient for disguising the imposition of an even more neoliberal policy, as suspicious as the strong coincidence between the official Party line on what has happened with the opinions expressed by leading Western communications media: that the Party has successfully avoided a return to Maoist practices and kept the reforms on keel. Others suggest a more long-term view: that the scandal has opened deep fissures in Party unity and revealed unsavoury aspects of Party practices to a general public that will become increasingly less inclined to tolerate both growing social inequality and arbitrary and corrupt governmental management, with unforeseeable consequences for the political system.