

Chen Xi 陈希

Born 1953



Current Positions

- Director of the Central Organization Department (2017–present)
- Member of the Politburo (2017–present)
- President of the Central Party School jointly with the China National School of Administration (2017–present)
- Deputy Head of the Central Leading Group for Inspection Work (2018–present)
- Deputy Head of the Central Leading Group for Party Building Work (2017–present)
- Executive Deputy Head of the Central Education Leading Group on the Theme of “Don’t Forget Your Original Ideal and Remember Your Mission” (2019–present)
- Member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the CCP (2017–present)
- Full member of the Central Committee of the CCP (2012–present)

Personal and Professional Background

Chen Xi was born on September 16, 1953, in Putian City, Fujian Province. He joined the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1978. Chen completed his undergraduate studies in chemical engineering at Tsinghua University in Beijing (1975–79). After graduating, Chen worked as an instructor for five months in the Department of Chemical Engineering at Fuzhou University in Fuzhou City, Fujian Province (1979). Chen then obtained a master’s degree in chemical engineering from Tsinghua University (1979–82). He went on to conduct chemical engineering research as a visiting scholar at Stanford University (1990–92).

Before pursuing an undergraduate education, Chen had been a factory worker in a machinery plant affiliated with Fuzhou University (1970–75). After his graduate studies, Chen remained at Tsinghua and served in several positions in the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL) Committee of Tsinghua University, including as head of the Sports Department, deputy secretary (1982–84), and secretary (1984–90). He concurrently served as deputy head (1985–87) and head (1987–90) of the Department of Student Affairs of the CCP Committee of Tsinghua. After returning from Stanford University, Chen became deputy party secretary of the Chemical Engineering Department at Tsinghua (1992–93). His advancement at Tsinghua continued with his appointment as deputy party secretary (1993–2000), executive deputy party secretary (2000–2002), and then party secretary of Tsinghua University and concurrently chairman of the University Council (2002–08).

Chen then joined the Ministry of Education as a vice minister and deputy party secretary (2008–10), after which he was transferred to Liaoning Province to serve as deputy party secretary (2010–11). Chen then became party secretary of the China Association for Science and Technology (2011) and concurrently served as the association’s executive vice chairman and first secretary of the Secretariat (2011–13). He served as executive deputy director of the Central Organization Department (COD) (2013–17). Chen was a member of both the 16th and 17th Central Discipline Inspection Commissions (2002–12). He was first elected to the Central Committee as a full member at the 18th Party Congress in 2012.

Family and Patron-Client Ties

Xi Jinping has helped advance the careers of many leaders in his inner circle, but perhaps no one has received more direct assistance from him than Chen Xi.¹ Xi Jinping and Chen Xi were classmates and roommates at Tsinghua University from 1975 to 1979. As sports fans who were also interested in politics and international affairs, Xi and Chen became close friends almost immediately after meeting at Tsinghua. On Xi's recommendation, Chen Xi joined the CCP at Tsinghua in November 1978, a few months before graduation.²

Soon after Xi became a member of the Politburo Standing Committee in 2007, he promoted Chen to be vice minister and deputy party secretary of education. In 2010, Chen was transferred to Liaoning Province, where he served as deputy party secretary. This role, in an important provincial-level administration, helped broaden Chen's leadership profile. Seven months later, Chen returned to Beijing and assumed the post of party secretary of the China Association for Science, a position equivalent to the rank of minister, which ensured him a seat on the Central Committee at the 18th National Party Congress. Soon after Xi became the top leader of the CCP, Chen was appointed executive deputy director of the Central Organization Department (COD) in Xi's first term and then director of the COD in Xi's second term, essentially becoming Xi's chief personnel officer. From that important leadership role, Chen has promoted many leaders from university administration and technocrats from the field of science and technology.³ Chen is married, and he and his wife do not have any children.

Policy Preferences and Political Prospects

As was the case in the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao administrations, the COD of the CCP Central Committee has played a crucial role in promoting personnel and ensuring strong support for the general secretary. Under the leadership of Chen Xi, the COD has promoted many members of Xi's political network to important positions during and since the 19th Party Congress. In the three-plus decades since 1989, Chen is the first non-member of the Politburo Standing Committee to serve as president of the Central Party School (CPS), which is not only the most important training center for political leaders in China but also a leading think tank in the country. This reflects his tremendous power and great influence. Chen has also played a key role in implementing Xi's call for strict enforcement of regulations on party officials and the establishment of a national supervision system.

Chen may either move on to become a member of the PSC at the 20th Party Congress or step down from the Party leadership this fall after promoting many of Xi's loyalists to key positions in the leadership. If he assumes a seat on the PSC, Chen will likely assume one of two positions: executive secretary of the Secretariat of the CCP Central Committee or secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI).

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

Notes:

¹ Cheng Li, *Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era: Reassessing Collective Leadership* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), pp. 329–31.

² Gao Xin, comments on Radio Free Asia website, April 17, 2014, <http://www.rfa.org/mandarin/zhuankan/yehuazhongnanhai/gx-04172014100823.html>, and April 30, 2013, <http://www.rfa.org/mandarin/zhuankan/yehuazhongnanhai/gx-04302013112626.html>.

³ Cheng Li, "The Growing Representation of University Administrators on the Central Committee," *China-U.S. Focus*, September 14, 2022, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/2022-CPC-congress/the-growing-representation-of-university-administrators-on-the-central-committee>.