

Li Qiang 李强

Born 1959



Current Positions

- Party Secretary of Shanghai (2017–present)
- Member of the Politburo (2017–present)
- Full member of the Central Committee of the CCP (2017–present)

Personal and Professional Background

Li Qiang was born in July 1959 in Rui'an County, Zhejiang Province. Li joined the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1983. He received his undergraduate education in agricultural mechanization at the Zhejiang Institute of Agriculture's Ningbo campus in Ningbo City, Zhejiang (1978–82). He pursued further studies through a graduate program in management engineering at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, Zhejiang (via part-time studies, 1995–97); a year-long full-time training program for young and middle-aged cadres at the Central Party School (CPS) in Beijing (2001–02); and a part-time graduate program in world economics at the CPS (2001–04). He also received an MBA from Hong Kong Polytechnic University in Hong Kong (via part-time studies, 2003–05).

Li began his career working at an electromechanical irrigation and drainage station in Mayu District, Rui'an County (1976–77) and then at the No. 3 Tools Factory in Rui'an County (1977–78). He served as a clerk and an official of the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL) Committee of Xincheng District, Rui'an County (1982–83), and as secretary of the CCYL Committee of Rui'an County (1983–84). He also served as deputy division head and division head of the Rural Relief Division of the Zhejiang Provincial Civil Affairs Department (1984–91), then as director of the Personnel Division of the Zhejiang Provincial Civil Affairs Department (1991–92), and finally as deputy director of the Zhejiang Provincial Civil Affairs Department (1992–96). Following those roles, he served as a member of the Standing Committee of Jinhua City, Zhejiang, and as party secretary of Yongkang City, Zhejiang (1996–98). Next, he served as deputy director of the General Office of the Zhejiang provincial government (1998–2000), and then as director and party secretary of the Bureau of Administration for Industry and Commerce in the Zhejiang provincial government (2000–02). After that, Li was appointed party secretary of Wenzhou City, Zhejiang (2002–04). He then became secretary-general (chief of staff) of the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee (2004–12). Finally, he served as secretary of the Zhejiang Provincial Commission of Politics and Law (2011–12), as deputy party secretary of Zhejiang (2011–16), and as governor of Zhejiang (2013–16).

Li was transferred to the neighboring province of Jiangsu, where he served as party secretary (2016–17). He was first elected to the Central Committee as an alternate member at the 18th Party Congress in 2012.

Family and Patron-Client Ties

Li Qiang is one of Xi Jinping's most trusted protégés. From 2004 to 2007, he worked directly under Xi as his chief of staff in the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee. Li's appointment as party secretary of Jiangsu — an important province that had been beset by scandals involving top provincial leaders — and his appointment as party secretary of Shanghai reflect Xi's intention to help bolster Li's leadership credentials. Li Qiang's wife worked in the transportation bureau of the Zhejiang provincial government before retirement. The couple has one daughter, who has studied in Australia.

Policy Preferences and Political Prospects

Li Qiang not only has Xi's firm support but also possesses substantial leadership experience. He has run the three most important provincial economies in the lower Yangtze River region: Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Shanghai. Li is exceptionally well positioned to promote greater economic integration in the lower Yangtze River delta region. He has been strongly supportive of private-sector and service-sector development. He is particularly interested in innovation related to information technology and artificial intelligence. For many years, Li has called for greater efforts to promote the "real economy" or "tangible economy" rather than the "virtual economy."¹

Under the leadership of Li Qiang, one of Shanghai's "magical" endeavors took place amid rising tensions in the U.S.-China trade war during the summer of 2018, when Tesla established its largest overseas plant in the city. Tesla, a Silicon Valley automaker, built a factory in Shanghai, where it would produce 500,000 electric cars annually. It took only ten months for this joint venture to advance from construction to full operation.²

In spring 2022, Shanghai was locked down for two months under the country's zero-Covid policy. The draconian measures and chaotic management implemented by Shanghai municipal authorities during this time infuriated Shanghai residents, not only reflecting serious flaws in governance, but also stymying Li Qiang's chance to become the next premier and making his ascension to the new Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) uncertain.³ However, the central government has still praised Li Qiang for his leadership role in firmly implementing Beijing's policy to protect public health in the city and beyond.

Because of his relatively young age, Li Qiang is often considered a member of the sixth-generation cohort (born in the 1960s), alongside rising stars currently in the Politburo such as Ding Xuexiang, Hu Chunhua, and Chen Min'er. Also, because of Li's closeness to Xi, Li remains a candidate for the PSC that will be formed this October. If he obtains PSC membership, Li will likely serve as executive vice premier of the State Council. If he does not, Li may retain his membership in the next Politburo.

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

Notes:

¹ *Southern Metropolis Daily* [南方都市报], January 26, 2017, http://news.southcn.com/china/m/content/2017-01/26/content_164397344.htm?from=singlemessage&isappinstalled=0.

² Cheng Li, *Middle Class Shanghai: Reshaping U.S.-China Engagement* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2021), p. 115.

³ Yew Lun Tian, "Analysis: Shanghai COVID crisis puts political spotlight on key Xi ally", Reuters, May 8, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/shanghai-covid-crisis-puts-political-spotlight-key-xi-ally-2022-05-08/>