

Ma Xingrui 马兴瑞

Born 1959



Current Positions

- Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Committee of the China Communist Party (CCP) (2021–present)
- First Political Committee Member of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) (2021–present)
- First Secretary of the Committee of the XPCC (2021–present)
- Full member of the Central Committee of the CCP (2017–present)

Personal and Professional Background

Ma was born on October 6, 1959, in Shuangyashan County, Heilongjiang Province. His ancestral home is Yuncheng County, Shandong Province. He joined the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1988. He received a bachelor's degree in mechanical and electrical engineering from Liaoning Technical University (previously called Fuxin Mining Institute) (1978–82) and completed his master's degree in mechanics at Tianjin University (1982–85). Ma then pursued a doctoral degree in mechanics at the Harbin Institute of Technology (1985–88) and worked there after graduation as an instructor, associate professor, and professor (1988–93). He was appointed chairman of the Aerospace Engineering and Mechanics Department (1993–96) and later became vice dean of the Aerospace College (1995–96) and vice president of the Harbin Institute of Technology (1996).

Ma was named vice president of the Chinese Academy of Space Technology in 1996 and led the *Shijian 5* satellite project as chief engineer (1996–99). In 1999, he was appointed as the deputy general manager of the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (1999–2007) and was promoted to general manager in 2007 (2007–13). That same year, Ma was elected as an academician in the International Academy of Astronautics. In 2013, Ma took several posts concurrently as vice minister of Industry and Information Technology, director of the China National Space Administration, director of the China Atomic Energy Authority, and director of the State Administration for Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense. He was also a member of the Special Committee of the Central Military Commission and a member of the Leading Group for Revitalizing the Industrial Bases in Northeast China.

Beginning in 2013, Ma worked as the deputy party secretary of Guangdong for eight years (2013–21). He was also appointed secretary of the Guangdong Political and Legal Affairs Commission (2013–15), director of the Social Work Commission of Guangdong Provincial Committee (2013–15), and party secretary of Shenzhen (2015–16). He became Vice Governor of Guangdong in 2016 and was promoted to Governor in 2017. Ma was a member of Central Coordination Group for Hong Kong and Macau Affairs from 2017 to 2021. He was transferred to Xinjiang in 2021 and currently serves as party secretary of Xinjiang.

Family and Patron-Client Ties

Ma was born into a family of very humble means. His father and two brothers were miners in the Shuangyashan Mining Bureau. Ma has advanced his professional and political career largely through the aerospace industry in which he worked for 25 years. As a rocket scientist, Ma served as chief commander for several space missions, including the Chang'e 3

Mission, China's first lunar surface exploration. The political ascendance of Ma and other rocket scientists, or "China's cosmos club" (*hangtianxi*), also reflects Xi's strategic emphasis on China's space development. Xi Jinping has long advocated prioritizing China's space program — the aerospace industry on both the military and civilian fronts — which he views as the best testimony to China's national strength and status on the world stage.¹

There are arguably other important reasons for Xi to promote leaders from the aerospace industry, which include 1) expanding channels for elite selection, 2) broadening and diversifying his political powerbase, 3) fostering a new generation of technocrats with a stronger inclination for indigenous innovation, 4) appointing "outsiders" to provincial/municipal leadership positions to undermine economic localism and locality-based political factions, 5) appointing former CEOs of China's flagship companies to be provincial chiefs in order to enhance economic efficiency and the international competition of localities, 6) promoting the integrated development of military and civilian enterprises, and 7) strengthening national security by building a more modernized defense industry. Not surprisingly, Ma has often been seen as Xi's key protege as he represents all of these trends.

Ma Xingrui's wife, Rong Li, was his classmate in graduate school. The couple has a daughter who also holds a doctoral degree.

Policy Preferences and Political Prospects

In addition to his political leadership role, Ma Xingrui has a large number of part-time academic positions and titles, including serving as a member of the discipline review group of the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council, executive director of the Chinese Society of Vibration Engineering, director of the Chinese Academy of Astronautics, guest director of the Chinese Society of Mechanics, head of the satellite technology professional group of the General Equipment Department of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, deputy editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Astronautics*, and editorial board member of the *Journal of Vibration Engineering and Applied Mathematics and Mechanics*.

Ma's broader professional background has been helpful to him as a top provincial leader. In Guangdong, he made concerted efforts to promote the construction of an international science and technology innovation center in the Greater Bay Area to respond to U.S.-China trade frictions and technological competition. During his tenure as governor, the province established three sets of 10 new provincial laboratories, contributing to the digital economy, 5G, 4K/8K ultra-high-definition video, new energy vehicles, and industrial robots.² Soon after he arrived in Xinjiang as party chief, Ma focused on several concrete changes, including 1) restoring Saturday as a day off for workers in the province; 2) inviting entrepreneurs from other provinces to invest in Xinjiang; 3) removing the turnstiles that restrict the flow of people in residential areas; 4) reducing armed soldiers and police cruising in streets; and 4) promoting the sinicization of Islam in Xinjiang.³

It is perhaps still too early to evaluate Ma's work in Xinjiang. But his appointment as party secretary in this important province has already secured him a membership in the 20th Politburo. Ma may even have a chance to attain a two-step promotion with a seat on the new Politburo Standing Committee.

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

Notes:

¹ Cheng Li, “The Rapid Rise of the “Cosmos Club” in the Xi Jinping Era.” *China-U.S. Focus*, July 15, 2022, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/2022-CPC-congress/the-rapid-rise-of-the-cosmos-club-in-the-xi-jinping-era>.

² “Interview with Ma Xingrui: Promoting Guangdong’s high-quality development to be at the forefront of the country.” [马兴瑞接受访谈：推动广东高质量发展走在全国前列], *Southern Daily* [南方日报], March 13, 2019, http://zfsg.gd.gov.cn/xxfb/ywsd/content/post_2222415.html.

³ <https://www.163.com/dy/article/HDHPJ5UT0515GFNQ.html>.