

Wang Yang 汪洋

Born 1955

Current Positions

- Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) (2018–present)
- Member of the 19th Politburo Standing Committee (2017–present)
- Head of the Central Coordination Group for Tibet Affairs (2018–present)
- Head of the Central Coordination Group for Xinjiang Affairs (2019–present)
- Deputy Head of the Central Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs (2018–present)
- Member of the Politburo (2007–present)
- Full member of the Central Committee of the CCP (2007–present)



Personal and Professional Background

Wang Yang was born on March 12, 1955, in Suzhou County, Anhui Province. He joined the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1975. He attended a program in political economy at the Central Party School (CPS) in Beijing (1979–80), received a bachelor's degree in public administration from the CPS (via correspondence courses, 1989–92), and received a master's in management science from the University of Science and Technology of China in Hefei City, Anhui (via part-time studies, 1993–95). Wang also twice pursued provincial-ministerial-level leaders' short-term study programs at the CPS (in 1997 and 2001).

Wang began working as a manual laborer and then served as manager in a food factory in Suxian County, Anhui (1972–76). He advanced his career first through the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL), serving as CCYL deputy secretary of Suxian County (1981–82), propaganda director of the CCYL Anhui Provincial Committee (1982–83), and deputy secretary of the CCYL Anhui Provincial Committee (1983–84). Next, he served as deputy director and then director of the Anhui Provincial Sports Commission (1984–88); as mayor and deputy party secretary of Tongling City, Anhui (1988–92); and, concurrently, as chairman of Anhui Province's Economic Planning Commission and assistant governor of the province (1992–93). At the age of 38, Wang was appointed executive vice-governor of Anhui Province (1993–99) and concurrently deputy party secretary of the province (1998–99). He was later transferred to the central government, where he served as vice-minister of the State Development Planning Commission (SDPC) (1999–2003) and then as deputy secretary-general (chief of staff) of the State Council (2003–05). He next served as party secretary of Chongqing (2005–07) and then party secretary of Guangdong (2007–12). Wang was then appointed vice-premier of the State Council (2013–18). Wang was first elected to the Central Committee as an alternate member at the 16th Party Congress in 2002.

Family and Patron-Client Ties

Wang was born into a family of humble means and lost his father at a young age.¹ As the eldest child, he began working at the age of 17 to help support his family.² Wang is widely considered a protégé of Hu Jintao, with whom he developed strong patron-client ties in the early 1980s when Hu was head of the CCYL and Wang was deputy secretary of the Anhui Provincial CCYL Committee. Some PRC journalists have reported that Deng Xiaoping “discovered” Wang Yang in 1992 during a visit to Anhui when Wang was the 37-year-old mayor of Tongling City. Deng was quoted as saying, “Wang Yang is an exceptional talent.”³

Wang's wife, Zhu Mali, is the daughter of a local leader; her father, Zhu Jianyuan, was deputy head of Suxian Prefecture. Wang and his wife have one daughter, Wang Xisha, who graduated from Peking University's Guanghua School of Management and received a master's degree from Tufts University. Her husband, Zhang Xinliang (Nicholas Zhang), is the grandson of former minister of defense Zhang Aiping. Zhang Xinliang received his bachelor's degree in international economics from Georgetown University.

Policy Preferences and Political Prospects

Wang has broad leadership experience in the central government (the SDPC and the State Council) and major provincial and municipal posts (in inland Chongqing and coastal Guangdong). While serving in these positions, Wang noticeably promoted certain policy initiatives. These included transforming China's economy from being export-driven and relying on cheap labor to an innovation-led model powered by domestic consumption; strengthening the private sector and foreign trade; arguing for the prioritization of economic growth over wealth redistribution ("making the cake bigger");⁴ promoting intra-party democracy and village elections; adopting a "soft approach" to managing public protests; increasing media transparency; and implementing bolder political reforms. As for U.S.-China relations, Wang has compared the relationship to a "married couple," once stating that China and the U.S. should not "choose divorce."⁵

Although his current position as chairman of the CPPCC is considered the least important on the Politburo Standing Committee, Wang's reputation as a reformer and his popularity among Chinese liberal intellectuals and private entrepreneurs makes him a formidable contender for influence. Wang may remain on the PSC for another five-year term after 2022, and he could also be a candidate for premier in 2023. If he assumes that position, it will reflect President Xi's intention to drastically change domestic policy in his third term or compromise based on possible pressure from the political establishment and interest groups. However, Wang may also step down from the PSC at the 20th Party Congress or serve in a more ceremonial governmental position, such as vice president of the PRC.

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

Notes:

¹ According to one unverified source, Wang's father served as party secretary of a food company in Suxian County.

² For more information about Wang Yang's family background and his early experiences, see Dou Zijia 窦梓稼, *Biography of Wang Yang: That "Wolf" in China's Political Arena* [汪洋传: 中国政坛那匹“狼”] (New York: Mirror Books, 2009), and Wang Yaohua 王耀华, *Competition among Provincial Chiefs* [诸侯争锋] (New York: Mirror Books, 2009), pp. 13–58. For Wang's recent views on and efforts toward political and economic reforms in Guangdong, see Cheng Li, "Hu's Southern Expedition: Changing Leadership in Guangdong," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 24, Spring 2008.

³ *Earth Week* [大地周刊], No. 23, 2009; also see <http://news.hexun.vnet.cn/2010-01-02/122228741.html>.

⁴ 方鸣 Fang Ming, "Is Bo & Wang's spat a war over party line?" [路线之争? 汪薄"蛋糕论"各出招]. *Duowei*, July 17, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120520043505/http://china.dwnews.com/news/2011-07-14/57906363.html>.

⁵ 汪洋, "中美像夫妻 不能走离婚路." *Southern Metropolis Daily* [南方都市报], July 12, 2013, <http://finance.sina.com.cn/china/20130712/035916098650.shtml>.