



1/2014

February 17, 2014

Secret “Document No. 9”: New Chinese Leadership’s Attack on Western Influence¹

by Theo Westphal²

After the 18th national congress of the China Communist Party (CCP) in November 2012, debates emerged about whether or not the newly elected leadership under Xi Jinping, who was said to be a “reformer”, would opt for more political and constitutional reforms and hopes concerning this matter were not rarely expressed.

However, a circular known as “Document No. 9”, which was secretly issued in April and leaked in August 2013, suggests that the CCP is now more concerned about losing grip and control over Chinese society than at any time in the recent past, leading to an attack on Western democratic values.³

Economic growth is nowadays regarded as one of the main pillars of one-party rule in China which ever since the CCP’s existence has been the most aspired aim for every single leadership. The contradictory setting of economic liberalization for the purpose of economic growth with simultaneous adherence to strict control over society in order to protect one-party rule, which dates back to the introduction of Deng Xiaoping’s “Reform and Opening up” (*gaige kaifang*), is the result of a deep-rooted fear within the party to meet the same disastrous fate as its Soviet archetype which collapsed in 1991.

Thus, as economic growth rates keep staying on a – for Chinese conditions – relatively low level, the new leadership under paramount leader Xi Jinping finds itself under pressure

and seeks to avoid losing control over societal developments, such as increasing anger about corruption, which – it is feared – could eventually lead to the party’s collapse. Just one month after his assumption of office in March 2013, the latter gave his blessing to a secret report, the so-called “Document No. 9” about the potential danger of Western values, which, by experts, is above all seen to be a proof of the disunity within the CCP.

The reasonable assumption of fragmentation between left- and right-wingers within the world’s biggest political party has been proven several times by the party’s own history: There have always been internal power struggles and those following the *Great Leap Forward* in 1958 or during the Tiananmen protests in 1989 are only two prominent examples.

This on-going power struggle within the CCP could lately best be observed during the dismissal from the Politburo, the exclusion from the party and the following trial of Chongqing municipality’s ambitious party chief Bo Xilai who was said to have big chances of acquiring a spot in the party’s leading body, the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC). He and his wife have been the main actors in one of the biggest political affairs in China’s recent past. His wife, Gu Kailai, was sentenced to a suspended death penalty because of murderer of an English businessman, whereas Bo – accused of bribery, corruption and abuse of authority – received a life sentence. The

noteworthiness of these scripted trials in the context of the “Document No. 9” matter is mainly due to two reasons. On the one hand, both symbolize the harsher approach that Xi is utilizing to safeguard one-party rule, and on the other hand, this current political approach also resembles that of the currently sentenced Bo who was best known for trying to reestablish Maoist principles in Chinese politics.

During the time as party chief of Chongqing, the leftist Bo initiated a red culture movement to revive Maoist campaigns, aiming to improve public morale. In this context, he supported the promotion of Maoist songs and quotations that date back to the time of the Cultural Revolution. After his election, Xi, on the other hand, began adopting some of these instruments to strengthen his own position within the party. Potentially, he wants to use the orders of “Document No. 9”, which were to be distributed among party officials, to satisfy extreme leftists for the purpose of the subsequent introduction of desperately needed economic reforms.

However, as plausible as this one-dimensional explanation may seem, it does not tell the full story. It excludes the fact that before Bo’s downfall, Xi’s assumption of office and the document’s release, there have also been repressive measures on the part of the Chinese authorities to counteract the civil society’s development, the best example being the censorship of the term “civil society” in the media in 2011.⁴ Thus, the influence of the Bo Xilai case regarding the increasing repressions needs to be put into perspective.

Nonetheless, due to the release of “Document No. 9”, the problem of repression has reached a new level. The secret report summarizes the potential danger of “Western democratic ideals” for untouched CCP leadership to seven perils that the party should try to fight in order to preserve the present one-party system. These seven dangerous currents are:

1. Promoting Western constitutional democracy. Attempting to negate current leadership and deny the socialist political system with Chinese characteristics.
2. Promoting the universal value of human rights. Attempting to shake the party's ideological and theoretical foundation.
3. Promoting civic participation. Attempting to disintegrate the social basis of the ruling party.
4. Promoting neo-liberalism. Attempting to change China’s basic economic system.
5. Promoting Western-inspired notions of media independence. Challenging the principle of party-controlled media and the press and publication management system.
6. Promoting historical nihilism. Attempting to negate the history of Chinese Communist Party and the history of the New China.
7. Questioning the Reform and Opening up, questioning socialist nature of socialism with Chinese Characteristics.⁵

One could argue that according to these points, political and constitutional reform as to establish an independent legal and media system or allow more participation of the civil society is not likely to happen in the near future. Meanwhile we should not forget the many successful actions on the local level that Chinese NGOs managed to achieve in the past (e.g. environmental protests resulting in shutdowns of local industrial plants). Although the fight for more rights may now seem harder than before the release of the “Document No. 9”, there is still reason to look with optimism to the future prospects of the Chinese civil society.

Sources:

Anti, Michael; Oster, Shai (2013): "Is Xi Jinping Redder Than Bo Xilai Or Vice Versa?", in: <http://www.chinafile.com/xi-jinping-redder-bo-xilai-or-vice-versa>, August 21, 2013. Last accessed on February 7, 2014.

Bandurski, David (2011): "China bans 'civil society'", in: <http://cmp.hku.hk/2011/01/11/9523/>, January 11, 2011. Last accessed on February 13, 2014.

Buckley, Chris (2013a): "China Warns Officials Against 'Dangerous' Western Values", in: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/14/world/asia/chinese-leaders-warn-of-dangerous-western-values.html?_r=2&, May 13, 2013. Last accessed on February 7, 2014.

Buckley, Chris (2013b): "China Takes Aim at Western Ideas", in: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/20/world/asia/chinas-new-leadership-takes-hard-line-in-secret-memo.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&, August 19, 2013. Last accessed on February 7, 2014.

China Digital Times (Staff Reporter) (2011): "Zhongxuanbu Guanyu 2011 Xinwen Xuanchuan Fangmian De Tongzhi", in: <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/2011/01/%E4%B8%AD%E5%AE%A3%E9%83%A8%E5%85%B3%E4%BA%8E2011%E6%96%B0%E9%97%BB%E5%AE%A3%E4%BC%A0%E6%96%B9%E9%9D%A2%E7%9A%84%E9%80%9A%E7%9F%A5/>, January 1, 2011. Last accessed on February 7, 2014.

Garnaut, John (2013): "The Great Irony of Bo Xilai's Downfall", in: <http://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/09/the-great-irony-of-bo-xilais-downfall/279885/>, September 23, 2013. Last accessed on February 7, 2014.

Global Voices Online (Contributor) (2013): "Leaked Chinese Document Warns Against the Evils of Western Values", in: <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2013/08/24/leaked-chinese-document-warns-against-the-evils-of-western-values/>, August 24, 2013. Last accessed on February 14, 2014.

Leigh, Russell (2013) "Is Xi Jinping Really After Reform?", in: <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2013/08/30/is-xi-jinping-really-after-reform/>, August 30, 2013. Last accessed on February 7, 2014.

Lubman, Stanley (2013): "Document No.9: The Party Attacks Western Democratic Ideals", in: <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2013/08/27/document-no-9-the-party-attacks-western-democratic-ideals/>, August 27, 2013. Last accessed on February 7, 2014.

Shieh, Shawn (2011): "Is China's civil society in danger?", in: http://ngochina.blogspot.de/2011/05/is-chinas-civil-society-in-danger.html?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter, April 22, 2011. Last accessed on February 7, 2014.

Tang, Hao (2012) "Shifang: a crisis of local rule", in: <http://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/5049-Shifang-a-crisis-of-local-rule>, July 18, 2012. Last accessed on February 7, 2014.

The Editors (2013): "Document 9: A China File Translation", in: <http://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>, August 11, 2013. Last accessed on February 7, 2014.

¹ This text aims at creating a concise overview of the issue at hand by summarizing the main opinions raised in the context of the leak of "Document No. 9". It therefore reflects the below-mentioned sources' content.

² Theo Westphal studies East Asian Politics at the Ruhr-University Bochum. He did an internship at the *Stiftung Asienhaus* for the period from August to October 2013, and is now one of its volunteers.

³ See: Lubman (2013); Buckley (2013a, 2013b).

⁴ See: David Bandurski (2011)

⁵ See: Global Voices Online (Contributor) (2013)