

## Will Jiang cede power after all?\*

Thomas Crampton

**NEW YORK:** Adding a new twist to recent speculation about the future of China's president, Jiang Zemin, two U.S.-based China scholars this week are publishing what they claim are internal Chinese documents contending that Jiang will resign from all his leadership posts in the Communist Party, state and military following a party congress in November.

Given China's opaque political system, it is impossible to confirm these reports independently, and some analysts are dubious about their accuracy. But if true, they would counter recent arguments that Jiang will try to hold on to some key positions, even after he resigns as president.

The new account of Jiang's plans will appear in a book to be published in November by Professor Andrew Nathan of Columbia University and Bruce Gilley, a doctoral candidate at Princeton. Excerpts from the book will appear this week in the New York Review of Books.

"This is the first succession battle in China's modern history fought according to agreed-upon rules," Nathan said this week. "It was a battle, however, and the struggling is not yet over."

Other reports in recent days have taken a more skeptical view, with some analysts convinced that Jiang will retain some posts, possibly including the top job as party general secretary.

The authors have declined to disclose the source of their information. But Nathan was a co-author of an earlier collection of allegedly secret documents from deep within China's leadership, "The Tiananmen Papers," while Gilley spent more than a decade closely covering Chinese politics, much of it for The Far Eastern Economic Review.

The current book is based on what the authors describe as confidential dossiers, compiled for the Politburo by the Chinese Communist Party's highly trusted and secretive Organizational Department, that were smuggled out of China early this year. Nathan and Gilley were given a manuscript compiled from the dossiers, and they conferred frequently with the U.S.-based compiler, who continues to provide a flow of updated information.

Listed by Nathan and Gilley in descending order by rank and according to protocol, those said to be poised to take over China's supreme leadership in November as members of the Politburo Standing Committee are:

Vice President Hu Jintao, 59, the long-signaled successor to Jiang, who would become the party general secretary, the Chinese president and chairman of the central military commission.

Li Ruihuan, 68, a former carpenter and bitter rival of Jiang, who would rank second as chairman of the National People's Congress. Li's name is notable due to Jiang's many elaborate but failed attempts to exclude him laid out in the reports read by Nathan and Gilley.

Deputy Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, 60, who would rank third and would succeed Zhu Rongji as prime minister in March 2003, according to the book.

While these top leadership positions have been widely anticipated, the authors also named three surprise candidates as poised to win appointments:

Wu Bangguo, 61, a onetime specialist in vacuum-tube technology, would rank fourth as chairman of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference, a largely symbolic assembly intended to show the support given to the Communist Party by distinguished Chinese who are not party members.

Luo Gan, 67, a former engineer educated in East Germany, would rank fifth as secretary of the Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission. Closely linked with Li Peng, who is currently the second-ranking party leader, Luo supervised police and intelligence operations during and after the 1989 Tiananmen crisis.

Zeng Qinghong, 63, a trusted aide of Jiang Zemin and son of an early party leader, would rank sixth as the secretary of the Party Secretariat. According to the documents obtained by Nathan and Gilley, Zeng is a skillful political tactician who secretly and deftly masterminded Jiang's consolidation of power.

Drawing a contrast between the current process and earlier leadership changes unilaterally executed by Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, Nathan and Gilley assert that the deliberations evident in the reports mean that Jiang was unable to dictate who would get any single seat in the Politburo.

The relative youth of some of the presumed new leaders means that their influence on China could be profound.

The authors describe this leadership group as determined modernizers intent on integrating China's economy with the world and on maintaining good relations with the United States.

In a separate article scheduled for publication later this month, also drawing on the secret dossiers, Nathan and Gilley describe China's putative new rulers as recognizing the recent failings of party rule and expressing their discontent with it.

Nonetheless, the leadership reportedly remains confident in their ability to win support and to co-opt or crush opposition, a confidence born of the economic boom and relative stability achieved since the crushing of pro-democracy protests on Tiananmen Square in 1989.

One shocking statistic to emerge from the dossiers is that the police and courts killed 60,000 prisoners in the last four years. This exceeds the maximum estimate of executions made by Amnesty International by more than 5,000 deaths per year.

While the emerging leaders did not run for office with public promises of change, one faction of the presumed new ruling group, led by Li Ruihuan, wants to see semicompetitive elections for more government and, within limits, greater freedom for the media, the authors write.

No information in the dossiers, however, hints that any of the putative new leaders would be willing to compromise the Communist Party's monopoly on power.

\*2 scholars cite documents hinting he will quit all key posts by **Thomas Crampton** (International Herald Tribune)Thursday, September 5, 2002