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# Preface

Dr. Bo has long been a major contributor to the literature on China's elites. This is the third of a trilogy. The first book, *Chinese Provincial Leaders: Economic Performance and Political Mobility since 1949*, came out in 2002. The second, *China's Elite Politics: Political Transition and Power Balancing*, dealt with the subject as it stood at the Sixteenth Party Congress, held in 2002. And this volume, the third, analyzes the Chinese ruling elite as it emerged at the Seventeenth Party Congress, which met in 2007.

In addition, Dr. Bo undertook a second, major task in this book, namely to assess the leadership's capacity to govern. He did this by examining how it handled four major crises and challenges that arose in 2008: the paralyzing snow storm early in the year, the Tibetan riots in March, the devastating earthquake of May, and the August Olympics. This is an unusual and creative approach to the analysis of elite politics.

The elite portion of the book can be read on two levels. First, the elite chapters constitute a very important work of reference for readers interested in the current Chinese rulers. Here, Dr. Bo has performed a major service to the profession. Prodigious research enabled him to produce a series of tables that contain an astonishing amount of information about the people who lead the most important political institutions of the country. If the reader wants to know how many Central Committee members hold PhD degrees, s/he can find the answer: 52, up from 12 on the Sixteenth Central Committee.

Readers interested in the representation of non-Han minorities, of women, in age distributions, educational levels, or study abroad experiences, can find an appropriate table.

The second, even more important level, is analytical. Dr. Bo brings to bear his own methodology to answer important political questions. A chapter is devoted to the shifting factional balance among the leaders, which, for instance, shows the numerical decline of the “Shanghai Gang” and the rise of the Youth League group around Party General Secretary and President Hu Jintao. Another chapter analyzes representation on the Central Committee of various Party and government institutions. Dr. Bo constructs a “representation index” for provinces, central institutions, and the military. He looks at the shifting balance of power between those Central Committee members who serve in provinces and those at the center. The fundamental finding is that Chinese political elite is becoming more and more institutionalized in terms of regularity of career patterns and of acceptance of key rules of the game.

The four “crisis” chapters show China’s leaders in action. Dr. Bo’s meticulously gathered data enables him to shed light on regime performance. The chapter on Tibet is an impressive effort to defend the Chinese record. Dr. Bo marshals a great deal of historical and contemporary data to make his case. Undoubtedly, others in the international academic community may take issue with his findings. In the case of the great snowstorm, he shows how leaders were more effective than others in taking remedial action. In contrast, the mobilization of national and international resources and personnel that followed up on the May earthquake was truly impressive and very much in contrast to the leadership’s performance during the even deadlier Tangshan earthquake in 1976, a measure of the distance that the Chinese ruling elite has come. And of course, the Olympics demonstrated to the world that China has truly arrived on the world stage. These chapters augur well for the capacity of China’s leaders to handle the current global economic crisis.

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