

POSTSCRIPT: *PLUS ÇA CHANGE...*

If Cai Delin's ascension to the presidency in 1993 had initially been seen by the SZU community as a ray of hope, the arrival of his replacements four years later came as a swath of blinding light after a long winter of discontent. During the summer of 1996 two new leaders, appointed by the municipal CCP, arrived on campus. They officially assumed their posts on 19 August, as Cai Delin and the long-serving vice-presidents, Ying Qirui and Zheng Tianlun, were retired.

The new president was Xie Weixing, a 55-year-old electronics engineer, who for the past six years had served as a vice-president at Xi'an Electronics and Technology Institute (Xi'an Dian). The city government had chosen Xie to be the new president on the recommendation of Ying Qirui, the outgoing SZU vice-president who had been a classmate of Xie. The new president, who had gained the rank of professor of engineering despite having only a bachelors degree, was widely published in the area of signal and information processing. He had studied and taught at the University of Pennsylvania in both the early 1980s and in 1989. He joined the CCP in 1985. Against the tide of Chinese intellectuals who departed China around the time of Tiananmen, Xie chose instead to return to the motherland. After his return he climbed administrative ranks. By 1992, as vice-president, he had gone as far upward as he could without leaving for a post at another institution. His relocation to Shenzhen was expected to be his final move in academia.

The new Party secretary was Jiang Zhong, a native of Heilongjiang who had served in various Party posts since her arrival in Shenzhen in 1982 during the SEZ's pioneering period. Miss Jiang, 48, had taught in secondary school during the early years of the Cultural Revolution and in 1973 served as a prison warden in the Jilin Forest Bureau, during which time she joined the CCP. Immediately before arriving in Shenzhen she had been assigned to the Philosophy Department of Heilongjiang University. During her decade and a half in the SEZ, Miss Jiang had held a number of positions: teacher in the Shenzhen Party School, deputy head of the Luo Hu propaganda department, deputy in the Shenzhen propaganda department, director and Party secretary of the local All-China Women's Federation branch, Party secretary of the bureau that supervises city government subsidiaries (such as the housing bureau), and finally as vice-president of the Shenzhen Party School. She was also a vice-president of the Shenzhen Socialism Institution and the Shenzhen Management Institute as well as a member of the first and second

consultative committees of the city government. Miss Jiang had been recommended for the SZU post by Shenzhen Vice-mayor Wu Jiesi, the key government official responsible for removing Cai Delin.

Shortly after they arrived on campus, the new leaders let it be known that they were going to carefully study the university and would be delaying policy changes for several months. Through the autumn and into winter, the university was beset by rumors but, true to the leaders' word, almost no formal policy changes were made. The new leaders kept out of the public eye; articles about SZU in the mass media, numbering two-three per week during Cai Delin's reign, virtually ceased. The leaders did not travel on delegations abroad; they basically stayed in their offices and worked. The *1996 Yearbook*, which covered the period of transition, contained no documents that enunciate new policies. The new leaders are hardly visible, either in the book's introductory photo essay or in speeches or written reports. Unfortunately, the annual also fails to provide many hard data, fewer than any previously issued volume.

The new leaders' first matter of concern, as directed by Vice-mayor Wu, was to safeguard the university against corrupt practices. The new leaders wanted the university staff to orient themselves away from making money. The Party secretary let it be known that the offices of SZU's CCP would no longer be running businesses, and she instructed that all business endeavors be transferred over to the General Affairs Office. Thus, the leech orchard, which had generated income for the Propaganda Department, as well as other commercial activities were centralized under GAO. The new leaders reasoned that if staff, including teachers, were deprived of their money-orientation, they would focus themselves toward administration, teaching and scholarship.

To further stem corruption, the new leaders initiated a new appointment process for six key offices: Personnel, General Affairs, Academic Affairs, Construction, Research, and Finance. All mid-level cadres took a civil service exam which was graded anonymously by examiners who were not part of the SZU community. Those cadres who scored high on the exam were then interviewed by the leaders. Party Secretary Jiang said in a meeting with cadres that those with histories of corrupt decision-making (such as that heavily influenced by *guanxi*) would not be considered for leadership positions. "If there is only one candidate, and this one is not clean, he will not be accepted," she told the assembly. The appointment process took almost a full year. With this concern about corruption, it is a bit ironic that the new leader appointed to head Foreign Affairs, Gao Litan, had been found guilty of fraud by the Disciplinary Commission of the SZU CCP just two years

earlier. This appointment led several informants to observe that the anti-corruption words were only window dressing and that the Party secretary was using this process “to put in her own people” in key positions in her administration.

Slowly, an educational policy focus also took shape. In this area, there were no substantive changes; Cai’s existing policies were given signals to continue. For example, the new leaders continued the policy to establish another level of administration, the college system. Already, the Teachers College and the Adult Education College had been formed. Approval for further administrative superstructuring was given. Existing departments were each assigned to new colleges of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Economics, Law, Natural Science, Arts, Information Engineering, and Management. New leaders were appointed to the colleges, almost all from the reserve of cadres who had held existing posts under Cai Delin. One teacher complained to me: It’s just old wine in new bottles. In any case, with the formation of a college structure, decision-making was further moved up the hierarchy, away from ordinary teachers, closer to the university leadership.

The university’s direction was not discussed in the mass media until the new leadership team had been on campus for 15 months. In November 1997 Shenzhen’s two leading newspapers each ran lengthy articles on the university to coincide with a provincial conference that took place in Shenzhen.¹ These articles praised the new leaders for improving the university’s educational environment. The journalists in one article pointed out only two problems that had existed at SZU in the past, “students’ lenient attitude toward study” and the absence of foundation courses. It noted that the quality of students had dramatically improved recently, notably in the area of moral education, as evidenced by the fact that “nearly 3,000 students sought Party membership.”² The longer and more comprehensive of the two articles noted other problems that had existed in the past and focused on “campus” commercialization.³ “Multi-kingdom economies” (*zhuhou jingji*) had resulted when departments branched out into commercial ventures. The article noted that Vice-mayor Wu had been especially concerned about this phenomenon and that the new leaders had eradicated it. The remainder of the article focused on methods that SZU was using to improve efficiency. The college system was praised, especially the distinction between college and department, but no discussion explained how this would improve efficiency, rather than just create an additional level of administration. The article ended with Cai Delin’s notable phrase (but here not attributed to him), that SZU was a three-type university: a special zone university, a window university, and an experimental university.

What the newspaper journalists failed to note was the single most important change that was occurring at SZU. By the middle of the new leaders' first year in office, university management was fully under the auspices of the Communist Party. The president-responsibility system, as enunciated by documents from the State Education Commission, was not practiced at SZU. Jiang, as Party secretary, was not just influential in decision-making. She was, in fact, responsible for every important decision at the university. President Xie attended numerous meetings but, according to observers, he acquiesced to the Party secretary's judgment in all matters, including those of a purely academic nature. The secretary worked long days and nights, sometimes sleeping on a cot in her office. She closely monitored the students, occasionally going to the dorms late at night in order to reprimand students who broke curfew. Despite procedures articulating a merit-based promotion policy, Miss Jiang personally had to approve all faculty promotions. She micro-managed decisions at the college and department level. "She runs the university like a military regiment" was how one former teacher characterized her management style.

With the CCP in control of running all aspects of the university, policies that under previous administrations would have been handled through administrative review procedures were now handled under the supervision of the Party secretary. One issue Jiang was especially troubled over was SZU's commercialization. She shared with vice-mayor Wu that the campus should look more education-oriented. Thus, she closed a number of shops and stalls, greatly restricting even the number of places that sold basic supplies such as writing tablets and pencils. Jiang was especially annoyed with the by then successful Ghost House, the restaurant/art gallery which the Guangdong Higher Court had ordered SZU to permit Professor Li Ruisheng to operate. Following the court's order, SZU in March 1993 had obtained a business license for Professor Li to operate his Folk Development Company under the name Three People Walking for a term of 15 years.⁴ Not following the advice of the court which had said that the restaurant/gallery should be privately run, the university had set up the company as school-run. The university had reported on its application that the business had ¥2 million in registered capital and ¥500,000 in current capital, all invested by SZU. At Li's insistence, however, the university provided him with a chopped and signed memorandum that clarified that the university had no financial investment in the company and that the investment was all his.⁵

In 1997 the University's Property Management Office informed Professor Li that he must vacate the premises. He was told that his contract expired 26 March 1998, that the private nature of his company contradicted the

fact that it was a publicly-run SZU enterprise, and that his business license did not permit the operation of a restaurant. The dispute between Li and SZU received national media attention in China. Articles appeared in Guangzhou and Hong Kong newspapers accusing the university of being a bully and being opposed to culture and art. Journalists from a Chinese Central Television investigative program named “3-15”, the equivalent of “60 Minutes” in the U.S., spent a week on campus.⁶ Their 20-minute report, which aired nationally in autumn 1998, sided with Li against the university. The journalists showed the viewing audience copies of the various documents that gave Li a business license valid until the year 2003 and which permitted him to operate a restaurant. A legal expert from Guangzhou who was interviewed confirmed that contracts remained valid even when work-unit leaders changed. The program’s presenter accused the university of refusing to follow the court’s recommendation that the company be licensed as a private business. It concluded that the university had been harassing Li so that “his company has never had a day of normal operation.” Finally, admitting he was “depressed” over the entire matter, Li agreed to sell the buildings to the university for ¥3 million, about three-fourths of their appraised value. He was ordered to remove his sculptures, numbering several thousand, into a warehouse.

Party Secretary Jiang refused to give an interview to the CCTV journalists. Not to be deterred (and following the tradition of “60 Minutes”), the journalists cornered Jiang in a corridor. An enraged Jiang attempted to cover the camera lens with her hand and shouted, as the camera continued to roll:

This event is a governmental action. Shut off your camera first. Give me your tape. Are you going to listen to me? In this place the power is with me. Do you want to listen to me? I am the Party secretary. At SZU my words rule.

The CCTV2 commentator:

Just because her words rule and the power is with her, a lawful contract became scrap paper. It is surprising how weak the law is at SZU.

The Li Ruisheng episode is distinctive only because of the level of exposure it has received. The rule of the Party over the rule of administrative process characterizes the Jiang administration.

Around the second anniversary of Jiang’s tenure, I asked one of my informants to describe Jiang’s administration. The response from my informant came in the form of a Chinese idiom, *huan tang bu huan yao* (literally, change the soup, not change the medicine). In traditional Oriental medicine,

herbs are boiled in water to become a “soup,” the liquid of which is used as medicine. For additional dosages, in order to be effective, of course, the herbs need to be constantly replenished. If one merely adds water to previously boiled herbs, the medicine is not efficacious. SZU, in other words, was making structural adjustments that would have little substantive effect on improving the quality of the university or its reputation. Educational politics has substituted for education. By autumn 1998, at the university’s fifteenth anniversary, there was no presidential administration per se at SZU. There was only Party, which had taken over administrative functions. The Party secretary had become the *de facto* president, a situation similar to when Luo Zhengqi was in charge, wearing both hats. The major distinction, however, was that Luo concerned himself with matters of education and did not see educational administration as a subset of Party administration. Party secretary Jiang was a politician, not an educator. She was concerned with issues like corruption and financial management, but not with issues such as knowledge structure, pedagogy, or student and teacher quality. Her administration was closed; she solicited views only from those in her inner circle; *guanxi* was more important than in any previous administration. Perhaps the closest Western equivalent in meaning to the Chinese idiom above is the French idiom, *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*. Indeed, over the past ten years, the more things have changed at SZU, the more they have remained the same.

1. Shuai & Lin, “If school is prosperous, I am honored,” 1997; Zhang & Yang, “SZU’s new strides,” 1997.
2. Shuai & Lin, “If school is prosperous, I am honored,” 1997.
3. Zhang & Yang, “SZU’s new strides,” 1997.
4. This derives from a Chinese idiom, *san ren xing, bi you wo shi*: if three of us are walking together, at least one of the other two is good enough to be my teacher.
5. “Memorandum between Li Ruisheng and Shenzhen University,” 26 March 1993.
6. “Who is bigger than the law?,” 3-15, broadcast 9:30-9:40 p.m. on CCTV2, 13 September 1998, and repeated twice the following day.