



China: Between the National People's Congress and the Party Congress

By Charles Parton

The various reports delivered at the 'Two Sessions', the meetings of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), add up to hundreds of pages. This Explainer looks at the main issues from the political and social angles, while the accompanying piece by George Magnus looks more from the economic perspective.

In a year of a Party Congress the overall tone was bound to be conservative, with the aim of ensuring a tranquil backdrop to an occasion which is expected to confirm the third term of Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), in his party, military, and state offices.

Until the advent of Covid-19 the NPC and the CPPCC met annually in March for between 10-14 days. In the last two years of Covid-19, meetings have lasted around a week. The NPC is the highest of five levels of people's congresses, an



important part of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) governance system.¹ The CPPCC, a body made up of not just CCP members but representatives of many sectors of society, is also an important institution at both national and lower levels. Both bodies are important constituents of 'whole process democracy', the CCP's latest jargon for its system of 'consultative Leninism'.²

The purpose of the 'Two Sessions' is threefold:

- To boost national morale. The five main reports, the Premier's Government Work Report (GWR), the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) (the main planning body), the Ministry of Finance, the Supreme People's Court, and the Supreme People's Procuratorate, enthusiastically lay out the main achievements of the previous year;³
- To reinforce instructions on important issues and policies;
- To act as a mechanism for the CCP to consult widely and take the temperature.

The 2022 'Two Sessions' might be described as somewhat lacklustre compared to other years. This is no surprise. The 14th Five Year Plan is now in its second year, the Fifth Plenum in October 2020 and subsequent meetings of the Central Economic Work Conference (CEWC) in December 2020 and 2021 laid down clear policy lines and tasks. As ever, much of the language of the documents emanating from the 'Two Sessions' repeats that of the documents of past NPCs, although the order of issues can vary, reflecting relative and changing priorities. Moreover, the main preoccupation of this year's meetings was to ensure a smooth glide path towards the Party Congress, which is scheduled for either October or November.

¹ The five levels are national, provincial, municipal, county, and township. There are 2.6 million deputies to people's congresses, with the vast majority at the lowest two levels, see: Zhang Yesui, 'Press conference', 04/03/2022, <https://bit.ly/3NOrOoc> (checked: 04/04/2022); The CPPCC system, which comes under the United Front Work Department, operates at four levels of governance and encompasses over 600,000 people, see: Robert Lawrence Kuhn, 'Whole-process people's democracy: CPPCC', *CGTN*, 10/03/2022, <https://bit.ly/3uWCTe5> (checked: 04/04/2022).

² The phrase 'consultative Leninism' was coined by Professor Steve Tsang from the School of Oriental and African Studies.

³ 'Report on the Work of the Government', State Council of the PRC, 11/03/2022, <https://bit.ly/3qYwaiP> (checked: 04/04/2022); 'Report on the Implementation of the 2021 Plan for National Economic and Social Development and on the 2022 Draft Plan for National Economic Aid', National Development and Reform Commission, 05/03/2022, <https://on.china.cn/3DE8Goa> (checked: 04/04/2022); 'Report on the Execution of the Central and Local Budgets for 2021 and on the Draft Central and Local Budgets for 2022', Ministry of Finance of the PRC, 05/03/2022, <https://on.china.cn/35GM0ar> (checked: 04/04/2022); '最高人民法院工作报告' ['Work Report of the Supreme People's Court'], 最高人民法院 [Supreme People's Court], 08/03/2022, <https://bit.ly/3NNBCi6> (checked: 04/04/2022); '最高人民检察院工作报告' ['Work Report of the Supreme People's Procuratorate'], 最高人民检察院 [Supreme People's Procuratorate], 15/03/2022, <https://bit.ly/3u9Bq5d> (checked: 04/04/2022).



The Party Congress is expected to confirm the continuation of Xi in his three main posts and elevate to the highest theoretical plane 'Xi Jinping Thought', shorn of its current cumbersome language and allowed to soar above the theoretical contributions of others. This process does not end at the Party Congress but runs up to March 2023, when the NPC will translate and confirm the CCP's party promotions into government posts. Stability is the watchword.

This Explainer looks at the points of interest arising from the 'Two Sessions' under the two headings of national security and 'common prosperity'. In the last few years the former has been elevated to the highest priority. Unsurprisingly, political security, which revolves around Xi's own ambitions, remains at the pinnacle. But energy, food and water security are also worth focussing upon. Although the words 'common prosperity' did not feature as much as might have been expected given recent emphasis in speeches and documents, the specific policy areas which contribute towards that slogan retain their importance. Employment, education, health, and rural revitalisation stand out.

There are issues which the CCP likes to refer to as 'black swans' or 'grey rhinos', the unexpected or the unclear. Covid-19 and the fallout of the Russian invasion of Ukraine are issues with the capacity to upset or alter the CCP's best laid plans.

As ever, what the centre describes or decrees is not always translated into reality on the ground. Over the last decade a significant refrain of both Xi and Premier Li Keqiang has been the failure of officials to successfully implement policy. The anti-corruption war continues, but the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) is now focussing even more on discipline than corruption.

Overall policy direction

It is worth reminding ourselves of the overall aims and policies coming out of the Fifth Plenum and CEWC meetings.

Goals

- To fulfil the 14th Five Year Plan;
- To become a modernised socialist country by 2035 (defined as having a gross domestic product GDP) per capita of US\$20,000 [£12,500]) and to



become *a powerful* modernised socialist country by 2049 (ie to fulfil the second ‘centennial goal’);

- To modernise the People’s Liberation Army fully by 2035 and for it to be a world class army by 2049;
- To achieve peak carbon by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2060.⁴

Priority tasks (as laid out in 2020 CEWC)⁵

- To strengthen strategic science and technology;
- To strengthen independent control over industrial supply chains (a move towards decoupling);
- To expand domestic demand (the long-held aim of increasing consumption as the main economic driver);
- To promote reform and opening up (while this sounds mildly contradictory to working towards independent supply chains, the CCP recognises that it will still need to rely somewhat on foreign technologies and investment);
- To solve the problem of seeds and arable land (enhancing food security and an urgent desire not to be vulnerable in this area to the United States (US) and its allies);
- To tackle monopolies and disorderly expansion of capital;
- To resolve housing in big cities;
- To work towards carbon neutrality.

Challenges

It is often more instructive to read the problem page of an official report than the parts lauding achievements. In late 2020, the Fifth Plenum communique listed the following as the main domestic threats:⁶

- Unbalanced and inadequate development (this is the ‘new principal contradiction’ – an important doctrine of CCP Marxism – announced at the 19th Party Congress in 2017);
- Reform is proving arduous;
- Innovation, long a top priority, is lagging;

⁴ ‘中国共产党第十九届中央委员会第五次全体会议公报’ [‘Communiqué of the Fifth Plenary Session of the Nineteenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China’], *Xinhua*, 29/10/2020, <https://bit.ly/3uSAq4x> (checked: 04/04/2022); ‘中华人民共和国国民经济和社会发展第十四个五年规划’ [‘The 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the PRC’], *Xinhua*, 13/03/2021, <https://bit.ly/3KgtUre> (checked: 04/04/2022).

⁵ ‘中央经济工作会议在北京举行’ [‘Central Economic Work Conference held in Beijing’], CCTV, 18/12/2020, <https://bit.ly/3x5jLxl> (checked: 04/04/2022).

⁶ *Ibid.*



- Agriculture remains backward;
- Inequality is pronounced;
- The environment remains in a poor state;
- The social security system is weak;
- There are considerable ‘weaknesses in social governance’ (the CCP is concerned about controlling the people, ensuring stability and thereby securing its rule).

‘Six stabilities, six guarantees’⁷

Perhaps one of the most crucial parts of Premier Li Keqiang’s GWR, both this year and in the past, is a small footnote, which also appears in the NDRC report. It is an explanation of the slogan ‘6 stabilities, 6 guarantees’. These are not new: the former first appeared in July 2018, the later in April 2020. The ‘6 stabilities’ describe the CCP’s overall governance aims, and the ‘6 guarantees’ set out how to achieve them. They are:

- 6 Stabilities: employment, financial sector, foreign trade, foreign investment, domestic investment, and expectations/expected work.
- 6 Guarantees: job security, basic living needs, operations of market entities, food and energy security, stable industrial/supply chains, normal functioning of primary-level governments.

Amidst domestic and international situations of considerable turbulence and in the year of a Party Congress which is to lead to important dispositions for the future, the continued emphasis on these aims and the ways of ensuring them comes as no surprise. They are reflected in the priorities discussed below.

The main points of interest from the ‘Two Sessions’

The issues considered here are grouped under two main headings which reflect the preoccupations of the Xi regime, national security and ‘common prosperity’. Finally, under the heading ‘black swans/grey rhinos’ it is important to consider how Covid-19 and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine may play out in this Party Congress year, and to remind ourselves that a perennial problem for Beijing is that local governments often fail to implement its order.

⁷ 六稳,六保. Oddly this is translated in the Xinhua document as ‘the six fronts and six areas’.

National security

The CCP has been fixated on national security in the last few years. As a concept, it is broadly defined; the CCP has now listed at least sixteen types of security.⁸ The 'Two Sessions' laid special emphasis on four.

Political security and the 'Two Establishments'

Hitherto the bedrock of the CCP's political canon has been '4-4-2': the Four Consciousnesses, the Four Confidences, and the Two Safeguards, of which the last is the most important (safeguarding Xi as core of the leadership and the unified leadership of the Central Committee).⁹ But particularly since the 6th Plenum of November 2021, however, senior CCP officials have been talking up the 'Two Establishments'. These are:

- Establish Xi Jinping as the core of the CCP;
- Establishing 'Xi Jinping Thought' as the guiding ideology.

The 'Two Establishments' are thus a step up from the 'Two Safeguards'. Documents from the 'Two Sessions', speeches, commentaries, and articles in the CCP press are full of references to the 'Two Establishments'. We can expect this trend to continue as a preparation for the Party Congress, when it seems almost certain that Xi will be confirmed for a third term in the three positions of General Secretary, Chairman of the Central Military Commission and President, and when 'Xi Jinping Thought' will also be elevated to an ideological pinnacle not accorded to any of his predecessors except Mao. Unsurprisingly, Xi regards the further strengthening of his rule as essential to political security.

Another important constituent of political security has been the two year rectification campaign in areas controlled by the Political and Legal Commission, which includes the security services, police, courts, and procurate. As mentioned, the CCDI has been putting more emphasis on discipline. The number of officials disciplined for failure to meet the standards and actions demanded by the CCP

⁸ Helena Legarda, 'China's new international paradigm: security first', MERICS, 15/06/2021, <https://bit.ly/3LG0moT> (checked: 04/04/2022).

⁹ The Four Consciousnesses are: maintain political integrity, think in big picture terms, uphold the core leadership, align with the party; the Four Confidences are: the path, party theories, Socialism with Chinese characteristics, Chinese culture (Xi may add a fifth, historical confidence, perhaps at the Party Congress); the Two Safeguard are: Xi Jinping as core of the leadership and the unified leadership of the Central Committee.



has risen dramatically,¹⁰ as has mention of the ‘Eight Decisions’, requirements promulgated in December 2012, relating particularly to the use of public resources for private benefit.

Energy security

Energy security is one of the ‘6 Guarantees’. Its importance has been further raised by widespread power cuts leading to industrial disruption in 2021. As relations with the US become ever more strained, the fear that the import of oil and gas supplies by sea might be blockaded in a crisis has grown. Energy is a major factor in the PRC’s behaviour towards Russia. It has also meant that the CCP has adopted a St Augustinean approach to reducing dependence on coal: ‘Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet’. While the goals of reaching peak carbon by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2060 were reaffirmed at the ‘Two Sessions’, coal consumption has been allowed to rise. Energy shortages threaten employment, which could lead to protests and instability. Avoiding these will always remain the CCP’s priority.

Food security

Food security has long been a top priority for the leadership and was the main concern of Central Document no. 1, the CCP’s first written pronouncement of the year and therefore important. This was further underlined by Xi’s choice of food security as the topic of his speech to a CPPCC group at the ‘Two Sessions’ on 6th March. With 20% of the world’s population and only 9% of its arable land, self-sufficiency is not feasible, but improved output, home-grown seed technology, and increasing acceptance of genetically modified crops will at least reduce foreign dependencies. As with energy, the CCP fears the vulnerability from being over-reliant on the US, Canada, and Australia, not just for grains, but also for seeds. Another fear is food inflation (Russia’s invasion of Ukraine will increase the price of imports, and the PRC had contracted over 3 million hectares of Ukrainian agricultural land).¹¹ The CCP has not forgotten that in 1989, one of the major causes of unrest was inflation.

¹⁰ In the first nine months of 2021, 414,000 officials were disciplined. In the decade since 2012, over 900,000 members have been expelled from the CCP, see: Yang Sheng and Zhang Han, ‘Top anti-corruption group meeting stresses zero tolerance for graft’, *Global Times*, 19/01/2022, <https://bit.ly/3Kfeozw> (checked: 04/04/2022).

¹¹ BJ Wang Mingyuan, ‘阜成门六号院 | 乌克兰战争喧嚣背后的真相’ [‘Fuchengmen No. 6 Courtyard: The truth behind the hustle and bustle of the Ukrainian war’], *China Digital Times*, 25/02/2022, <https://bit.ly/3J3HQqI> (checked: 04/04/2022).

Water security

The NPC documents contain a steady drip of references to water conservancy. This is not surprising, since water scarcity (eight northern provinces suffer from acute water scarcity, four from water scarcity;¹² they contain 38% of the PRC's agriculture, 50% of its power generation, 46% of its industry and 41% of its population¹³) is perhaps one of the top four problems which most threaten the PRC's economic rise.¹⁴ Such a judgement appears to be one with which Xi himself would agree. During his May 2021 inspection of the South North Water Transfer project, he declared that:

Water is in severely short supply in our country. A poor solution will affect the realisation of our second centenary goal and the realisation of the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.¹⁵

It is worth noting that of the six ministers who appeared at NPC press conferences, one was the minister of water resources. The choice of topics reflects the seriousness of CCP concerns. The Ministry of Finance also listed transport, energy, and water as main areas for 'leveraging the guiding role of government investment'.¹⁶

'Common prosperity'

It might seem perverse to use this heading, given that many commentators identified a surprising drought at the 'Two Sessions' in the number of uses of the expression, which has taken over from poverty alleviation as a mainstay of Xi's rhetoric.

But the conclusion that the CCP might be backing away from 'common prosperity' is unfounded. The NPC reports will have been drafted and signed off well before their delivery, a period in which the term has been common currency.

¹² The Falkenmark indicator defines water stress as < 1,700 m³ per person per year; water scarcity as < 1,000 m³, and absolute water scarcity as < 500 m³. This is a very rough indicator.

¹³ Charlie Parton, 'China's looming water crisis', *China Dialogue*, 17/04/2018, <https://bit.ly/3J8s8KL> (checked: 04/04/2022).

¹⁴ In the author's opinion, the four problems are debt, demographics, water and poor education, perhaps in that order. For a detailed discussion of the water crisis see: *Ibid*.

¹⁵ "“中华民族的世纪创举”——记习近平总书记在河南专题调研南水北调并召开座谈会" [“The Chinese Nation's centennial undertaking” – recalling General Secretary Xi Jinping conducting a special investigation on the South North Water Diversion Project in Henan and convening a symposium’], *Xinhua*, 16/05/2021, <https://bit.ly/37mQpzS> (checked: 04/04/2021).

¹⁶ 'Report on the Execution of the Central and Local Budgets for 2021 and on the Draft Central and Local Budgets for 2022', Ministry of Finance of the PRC, 05/03/2022, <https://on.china.cn/35GMOar> (checked: 04/04/2022).



Just two weeks before the ‘Two Sessions’, the NDRC was promoting the ‘Action Plan for Promoting Common Prosperity’.¹⁷ Moreover, the policies emphasised at the NPC very much reflect the ‘common prosperity’ agenda.

‘Common prosperity’ is a slogan, but like all CCP slogans, it is a condensation of an important principle or policy (‘National rejuvenation’ is another). Both are overarching goals. Common prosperity is shorthand for the method of resolving the new principal contradiction, which was rolled out at the 19th Party Congress in 2017, a doctrine of the greatest theoretical and practical importance in a Chinese Marxist system. Since 1949 there have been only four iterations.¹⁸ Xi declared the latest version to be ‘between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life’.¹⁹

Box 1: What is ‘common prosperity’?

In a speech to the August 2021 meeting of the CEWC, Xi listed the following six paths to common prosperity:²⁰

- **Make development more balanced, coordinated, and inclusive.** Reduce regional inequalities, monopolies.
- **Expand the size of the middle-income group.** Help education and technical training, rural migrants' conditions and mobility, improve the environment and taxes for small and medium sized businesses.
- **Promote equitable access to basic public services**, including education, pensions, health, social security and housing.
- **Adopt rigorous measures to regulate high income**, by tax reform for incomes, capital gains, real estate and consumption
- **Achieve common prosperity in a non-material sense.** Strengthening core socialist values, patriotism and culture.
- **Promote common prosperity in rural areas.** Stop a relapse into poverty, revitalise rural infrastructure and agriculture.

¹⁷ Liu Liliang, ‘国家发改委：推动制定出台“促进共同富裕行动纲要” 牵头研究制定扩大中等收入群体实施方案’ [‘National Development and Reform Commission: Promote the formulation and release of the Action Plan for Promoting Common Prosperity, and lead the study and formulation of an implementation plan for expanding middle-income groups’], *China Securities*, 17/02/2022, <https://bit.ly/370xoVg> (checked: 04/04/2022).

¹⁸ Xu Lingui, ‘Xinhua Insight: China embraces new “principal contradiction” when embarking on new journey’, *China Today*, 21/11/2021, <https://bit.ly/3KbfbkZ> (checked: 04/04/2022).

¹⁹ Xi Jinping, Speech, ‘Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era’, 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, 18/11/2017, <https://bit.ly/2RPqSHr> (checked: 04/04/2022).

²⁰ Xi Jinping, Speech, ‘Making Solid Progress Toward Common Prosperity’, *Qiushi Journal*, 20 (2021).



Reducing inequality is an important constituent. Xi has been speaking about gaps between regions, rural and urban areas, and in incomes. It is not a new concern; this trinity was flagged up in a meeting in 2014 between a minister at the International Department of the CCP and the incoming European Union ambassador as one of the three most serious threats to the CCP's hold on power.²¹ But it is far broader than that, and includes a spiritual and cultural significance (see Box 1).

The importance of 'common prosperity' is visible from the issues which receive emphasis at the 'Two Sessions'. In the section of the NDRC report entitled 'Focus on ensuring and improving public wellbeing and steadily raising people's living standards', after a section on more equitable income distribution, the other areas dealt with were employment, education, health, social security, and public services. Four issues deserve particular attention.

Employment

Employment comes first in both the 'Six Stabilities' and the 'Six guarantees'. The much commented upon GDP growth target of 5.5% is the handservant of employment. With an inadequate social security net those without jobs represent a threat to stability and to the regime. As ever, officials are to concentrate on the three groups which could pose the most danger: the educated (students); military veterans (those disciplined and trained in arms); and rural migrants (the biggest mass of disadvantaged, always the most vulnerable in an economic downturn). The CCP is also acutely conscious that the main driver for job creation is the private sector. Yet there seems to be a gap between the rhetoric of support for small and medium sized enterprises and a decade of claims to have reduced administrative red tape and fees on the one hand, and a playing field tilted in favour of the state owned sector on the other.

Education

The CCP's aim to see the PRC as a hi-tech modern industrial power will not be achieved without far more extensive and better education. No country has escaped the 'middle income trap' with a work force wherein less than 60% of workers have finished secondary education. The figure for the PRC only just tops 30%. Meanwhile, 70% of children are raised in the countryside, where health and education services are substandard.²² The CCP is acutely aware of this, which is

²¹ Meeting attended by the author, September 2014.

²² For a detailed exposition of this argument, see: Natalie Hell and Scott Rozelle, *Invisible China* (The University of Chicago Press, 2020).



why in the GWR's section on 'Ensuring and improving the people's wellbeing and promoting better and new ways of conducting social governance' education is the first topic considered. Improving education in rural areas is a priority, as is vocational training. Reducing inequalities in education between regions will contribute to 'common prosperity'.

Public health

Public health has long been an urgent area for development and reform. It has taken on added significance in the light of the CCP staking much on the comparison between its handling of Covid-19 and that of the US and Europe. The importance of health reform is sometimes underestimated by outside commentators. It is worth reflecting that in a review of obstructions to reform carried out by a NDRC think tank in 2017 one of the five areas of reform considered was health (along with the administrative approval system, state-owned enterprises (SOEs), tax, and the hukou [home registration] system).²³ That underlines its importance.

Rural revitalisation

Another key aspect of common prosperity is rural revitalisation and it is one which has received considerable attention both before and during the NPC. Many of the 600 million people living off less than ¥1,000 (£120) a month to whom Premier Li Keqiang referred at the 2020 NPC,²⁴ are registered as rural residents. The CCP has also been busy setting up 'new era civilisation centres'. These function as cultural hubs, but also are important for disseminating CCP propaganda and ideology, as well as being a first line of imposing greater control. While there is no immediate threat of unrest in the countryside, the possibility of unchecked inequality in an economic downturn leaves the CCP nervous.

Many have rightly observed that if Xi was really serious about redistribution he would initiate **tax reform**. Redesigning the income tax system and introducing property, capital gains, and inheritance taxes would greatly help. Yet, the NPC documents, including the Ministry of Finance report, Part 3, 'Fiscal Reform and Development in 2022', Section 6, 'Deepening fiscal and tax system reform', mention none of this. Tax deductions, cuts, evasion, and fraud feature; reform does not.

²³ Zhang Linshan and Sun Fengyi et al., *改革梗阻现象：表现、根源与治理* [The Phenomenon of Reform Obstruction in China: Performance, Origin and Solution] (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2017).

²⁴ Li Lei, 'Challenge remains as nation tries to scrap absolute poverty', *China Daily*, 06/10/2020, <https://bit.ly/3ubKx5s> (checked: 04/04/2022).



No more do other **important areas of reform** receive more than a perfunctory nod. For all that ‘normal functioning of primary-level governments’ is the sixth of the ‘6 Guarantees’, the problem of their receiving half of revenues while being responsible for 80% of expenditure is not addressed. Nor is SOEs or hukou (home registration) reform. The run up to the Party Congress is not the time to introduce potentially destabilising measures.

Black swans/grey rhinos

Covid-19

On Covid-19 policy Li Keqiang talked of ‘continu[ing] effective routine Covid-19 control’²⁵ and the NDRC report of ‘maintaining China’s world-leading position in Covid-19 control’.²⁶ Neither report suggested signs of a rethink. Nor did the NPC spokesman at his press conference:

Facts have proved that the “dynamic clearing” approach is in line with the actual situation in China, the approach is correct, and the effect is good.²⁷

Yet the risk for this year is very high that the direct costs of the CCP’s current strategy, as well as the indirect costs through losses and disruption in production and consumption, may force a change (a Hong Kong professor has estimated that Covid-19 lockdowns are costing the country at least US\$46 billion (£35 billion) a month, or 3.1% of GDP, in lost economic output). This may prove a very troubling prospect for the CCP. Propaganda has been adamant that the PRC has succeeded where the West has made a mess of dealing with the pandemic. If the CCP decides that it must relax its Covid-19 strategy to prevent economic dislocation, the high transmissibility of new Covid-19 variants, combined with Chinese vaccines of unproven effectiveness, may result in more cases than the weak health system can deal with. This will not help CCP claims of a superior system of governance, and if the numbers unable to get treatment spill over, there may be protests. The CCP will hope to hold the line until after the Congress. Even then, it may delay until more effective vaccines have been developed and put into the arms of the vulnerable. Delay, however, could be dangerous.

Russia’s renewed invasion of Ukraine

²⁵ ‘Report on the Work of the Government’, State Council of the PRC, 11/03/2022, <https://bit.ly/3qYwaiP> (checked: 04/04/2022), p. 11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁷ Zhang Yesui, ‘Press conference’, 04/03/2022, <https://bit.ly/3r56Asl> (checked: 04/04/2022).



The invasion of Ukraine began after the documents of 'Two Sessions' would have been finalised. The crisis has the potential to cause the CCP severe headaches. The nightmare scenario for the CCP is that Vladimir Putin, Russia's President, falls, and a succeeding, possibly democratic, regime turns Russia into a European democracy. The outcome in Ukraine and the effects on the PRC are still unclear. The CCP will be watching the effects of sanctions closely and eager not to get caught up in secondary sanctions. Yet its deep anti-Americanism and its support for a fellow autocracy will pull it in a contrary direction. Inflation will be another worry, particularly if the invasion leads to higher domestic prices, including food imports. Inflation was a major cause of the 1989 protests in the PRC. The invasion could also deepen the current economic downturn. It will almost certainly accelerate the decoupling of the economies of the PRC and the liberal democracies.

And finally...implementation: a reminder to seek truth from facts

Perhaps the most important group in the PRC are the 2,850 odd county CCP secretaries. Both Xi and Li Keqiang have spent the last decade alternatively railing against or cajoling them to implement central policies. Hence the importance of the August 2015 conference on 'How to be a model country party secretary in the style of Jiao Yulu'.²⁸ Once again, Li Keqiang complained about this in his work report:

Pointless formalities and bureaucratism remain an acute issue. Cases of becoming detached from reality and acting against the public will are still frequent. Some local governments use one-size-fits-all or campaign-style approaches in policy implementation. A small number of officials either shirk their responsibilities, fail to do their jobs, or behave irresponsibly. Some officials, by disregarding serious infringements on the rights and interests of the people, have been derelict in their duties. Corruption remains a common problem in some sectors.²⁹

²⁸ Jiao Yulu is the embodiment of the virtues Xi Jinping would like to see in subordinates. Despite being ill with the cancer which eventually killed him, he worked ceaselessly and selflessly to improve the lot of impoverished Lankao county.

²⁹ 'Report on the Work of the Government', State Council of the PRC, 11/03/2022, <https://bit.ly/3qYwaiP> (checked: 04/04/2022), p. 9.



One of the laws amended at the NPC was the Organic Law of Local People's Congresses and Local People's Governments at All Levels of the People's Republic of China'. The changes are aimed at ensuring better implementation of central directives.

These are timely reminders that however successfully the 'Two Sessions' fulfils its goals of morale boosting, direction, and consultation, the picture painted by the centre is not always reflected in a vast country where, as the old saying goes: 'Heaven is high and the emperor is far away'.



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