



The 20th Party Congress: What it means for the CCP and the world

By Charles Parton

The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) 20th National Congress has come and gone, smoothly and without incident – apart from the departure of Hu Jintao, former General Secretary of the CCP, from the stage during the final session. Even if occasioned by debilitating senility rather than political intrigue or protest, it was symbolic of the long defunct significance of so-called 'party elders'.¹

This Explainer follows on from an earlier one entitled 'The CCP's 20th Party Congress: What to look out for?'.² It revisits the outcomes of the four main strands of a Party Congress: renewing the CCP's leadership; fortifying ideology; strengthening the party's role and discipline; and guiding the overall direction of policy. It then considers what they imply for the PRC's future of domestic and foreign policy.

Congresses are not the place for surprises. It would have been strange if there were any: Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CCP, has clearly shown his

¹ For arguments on why the 'Hu Jintao incident' is likely to have been 'cock-up rather than conspiracy', see: Charles Parton, 'Don't read too much into Hu Jintao's disappearance', *The Spectator*, 03/11/2022, <http://bit.ly/3THkH2G> (checked: 17/11/2022).

² Charles Parton, 'The CCP's 20th Party Congress: What to look out for', Council on Geostrategy, 10/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3UEPGop> (checked: 17/11/2022).

direction of travel during his first ten years in power and he is not a man prone to second thoughts. At the start of the year he set up two committees specifically to vet candidates for the Central Committee and to draft the general secretary's political report. He kept an eagle eye on progress.³ If there was a surprise, it was that both a description of Xi himself as 'Leader' and the simplified title of his guiding ideology were not included in the CCP constitution. But there was no surprise about the substance: Xi emerged with greater, if not untrammelled, power.

The 205 full members of the Central Committee (CC) are almost all known in advance: provincial leaders, heads of CCP departments, top military generals and others enter *ex officio*. Xi had already promoted loyalists into those positions over the last couple of years. Nor was it a surprise that the new membership of the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) showed clearly that there is only one faction in Chinese politics: the Xi faction.

The importance of ideology, whether under the unwieldy title of 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era' or plain 'Xi Jinping Thought', received the expected emphasis. Xi's advance in ideology is an amalgam of the 'basic principles of Marxism with the concrete reality of China, and the combination of the excellent traditional Chinese culture.'⁴ A cynical observer might suggest that 'Xi Jinping Thought' is 'magpie Marxism', an eclectic picking of elements from these three sources, which best serves his and the CCP's purposes. But, eclectic or not, Xi is a true believer in his '21st century Marxism'. The past decade has revealed his intention to bring ideology to the front of political, economic and social life. That trend will accelerate – and spill into foreign relations.

Reinforcing the role and discipline of the CCP has been a ten-year concern of Xi. His answer to the problem of the 'cycle of dynasties' (their fall occasioned by rulers losing their original spirit and discipline) is 'self-revolution' and strict adherence to the CCP's discipline code, which he has reinforced continuously ever since emphasising the '8 Decisions' of December 2012 shortly after coming to power. Xi intends that a party with strengthened ideological and disciplined sinews will enter more deeply into all elements and organisations within broader society. This is totalitarianism with Chinese characteristics.

³ For the official account of this work, see: '领航新时代新征程新辉煌的坚强领导集体 – 党的新一届中央领导机构产生纪实' ['A strong leadership group that leads the new era, new journey, and new glory – The documentary of the party's new central leadership'], *人民日报* [People's Daily], 25/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3GfuoCm> (checked: 17/11/2022).

⁴ "“夺取新时代中国特色社会主义新胜利的政治宣言和行动纲领” – 中共中央举行新闻发布会解读党的二十大报告' ["Political Declaration and Program of Action for the New Victory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era" – The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China held a press conference to interpret the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China'], *人民日报* [People's Daily], 25/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3GtswWu> (checked: 17/11/2022).



A Party Congress sets the guiding policy for the CCP and state for the next five years. His political report underlines existing policy trends and emphases. Specific measures are left for later occasions. A general secretary's report contains much cut and paste, but over the years sections have been added, which declare a leader's priorities. Thus in 2007, Hu added the well-being of the people, and in 2012, under Xi's influence, the environment. In 2022, Xi has shown the importance of three areas, which were promoted from sub-sections in the report to independent topics: scientific and technological innovation, law based governance and national security.

Rule by document

The CCP rules by document, of which the constitution and the report to the Party Congress are the most important.⁵ All other documents subsequently issued must be in line with them. The importance of the CCP constitution is evident from the fact that Xi himself presided over 11 meetings to consider amendments.⁶ As for the congress report, the constitution declares that it is the 'crystallisation of the wisdom of the whole party and the Chinese people...' and 'lead[s] them in upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.'⁷

In the five years between each Party Congress many circumstances will change. But the CCP constitution and the general secretary's political report are intended to set the approach to dealing with events which can be foreseen and also those which cannot be anticipated. Following the congress, the CCP is rolling out a programme of propaganda and study of these documents for all its members, from the Politburo down to the village level.

As the Politburo meeting on 25th October 2022 declared:

⁵ Wu Guogong, '“Documentary Politics”: Hypotheses, Process, and Case Studies', Carol Lee Hamrin and Suisheng Zhao (eds.), *Decision-making in Deng's China* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 26.

⁶ '让党旗在新征程上高高飘扬 – “中国共产党章程(修正案)” 诞生记' ['Let the party flag fly high on the new journey – The Birth of the Constitution of the Communist Party of China (Amendment)'], *人民日报* [People's Daily], 27/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3UEskIk> (checked: 17/11/2022).

⁷ '中共中央关于认真学习宣传贯彻党的二十大精神的决定' ['Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Conscientiously Studying, Propagating and Implementing the Spirit of the Twentieth National Congress of the Communist Party of China'], *人民日报* [People's Daily], 31/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3UZrANJ> (checked: 17/11/2022).



Studying, publicising and implementing the guiding principles of the 20th CCP National Congress is a primary political task for the party and the country at present and for some time to come.⁸

A top-level decision has seen a central propaganda group sent out to visit provinces and cities to promote their leaders' study of the spirit of the congress. They in turn will send local groups into communities and there will be media campaigns, academic articles and think tank analyses.⁹ If we wish to understand the PRC, we too must study the congress carefully.

Leadership changes: There is only one faction, the Xi Jinping faction

The documents and subsequent high-level commentaries in the CCP's media organs give indications of the future of CCP rule. But crucial to those considerations are the implications of the new leadership line up and an assessment of the power of Xi.

Despite the talk of the congress 'electing' the CC, which in turn 'elects' the Politburo and the PBSC, the reality is that Xi kept tight control on the selection of candidates, just as he did in 2017. As a *Xinhua* report makes clear, recommendation can be made by many, but consideration belongs to the Politburo and its standing committee, and the decision rests with Xi.¹⁰ Of the 205 full (i.e., voting) members of the CC, all but a handful of the candidates for 'election' are determined by their posts as provincial CCP secretaries and governors, heads of CCP departments, ministers, generals and other top posts. Many of those have been in position since before the congress; all will have gained Xi's approval.

There is more leeway for alternate (non-voting) members of the CC, but even there control is tight (perhaps tighter than in 2017: all but 12 of the elected

⁸ '党中央就贯彻党的十九大精神作出部署' ['CPC leadership makes arrangements for implementing Party congress guiding principles'], *新华社* [*Xinhua*], 25/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3tAFies> (checked: 17/11/2022).

⁹ '中共中央关于认真学习宣传贯彻党的二十大精神的决定' ['Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Conscientiously Studying, Propagating and Implementing the Spirit of the Twentieth National Congress of the Communist Party of China'], *人民日报* [*People's Daily*], 31/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3UZrANJ> (checked: 17/11/2022).

¹⁰ '领航新时代新征程新辉煌的坚强领导集体 – 党的新一届中央领导机构产生纪实' ['A strong leadership group that leads the new era, new journey, and new glory – The documentary of the party's new central leadership'], *人民日报* [*People's Daily*], 25/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3GfuoCm> (checked: 17/11/2022).



received the same number of votes, whereas in 2017 the figure was 87, a consistency which may betoken greater control).¹¹

A smidgin of significance is given to the concept of voting, in that the number of candidates is greater than posts on offer (a system known as ‘cha’e’ 差额). This remains in line with five years ago: 222 full member candidates of whom 205 were elected, an 8.3% difference; 188 alternate member candidates for 171 places, a 9.9% difference.¹² But this is small fare, given the control Xi exercised over the choice of candidates.¹³

That those close to Xi have comprehensively occupied the CC, its Politburo and the PBSC should not have been a surprise, any more than the demise of those whom Xi ‘inherited’ from the promotions of his predecessors. This was the culmination of what Xi has been doing for the past decade. He has always promoted those with whom he has worked and built up trust, and those who show their devotion to his ‘mission’ and maintain discipline. This may be dressed up in language about the importance of politics:

General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasised that the candidates for the central leadership should put political standards first, strictly control politics, and keep the bottom line of integrity.¹⁴

But the reality is betrayed by, for example, the retention of Zhang Youxia (aged 72), a general in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), on the Central Military Commission. There are surely sufficient generals who meet the ‘political standards’, but few who are as close to Xi as Zhang, just as their fathers had been. ‘Political standards’ – which we might translate as ‘loyalty to Xi Jinping’ – are a necessary but not always sufficient condition for promotion.

Other observations can be made about personnel processes and changes:

- Unlike the account given in 2017, there is no mention that the deliberations of the ‘two committees’ (for personnel selection and report drafting) involved consulting ‘party elders’. Again, this is no surprise. Jiang Zemin,

¹¹ Candidates for the alternate membership are listed by the number of votes gained. Where candidates receive the same number of votes, they are listed within that group by character in stroke order. The method of voting is not revealed.

¹² ‘高举伟大旗帜 谱写崭新篇章 新一届中共中央委员会和中共中央纪律检查委员会诞生记’ [‘Holding High the Great Banner and Writing a New Chapter – The Birth of the New Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Communist Party of China’], 新华社 [Xinhua], 25/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3XjpGd1> (checked: 17/11/2022).

¹³ ‘党中央就贯彻党的十九大精神作出部署’ [‘CPC leadership makes arrangements for implementing Party congress guiding principles’], 新华社 [Xinhua], 25/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3tAFies> (checked: 17/11/2022).

¹⁴ ‘领航新时代新征程新辉煌的坚强领导集体 – 党的新一届中央领导机构产生纪实’ [‘A strong leadership group that leads the new era, new journey, and new glory – The documentary of the party’s new central leadership’], 人民日报 [People’s Daily], 25/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3GfuoCm> (checked: 17/11/2022).



former General Secretary of the CCP, is now 96 and very frail; Hu is clearly not well. Nor despite the musings of some in the commentariat did accounts mention a role for the ‘Beidaihe meeting’, which long ago ceased to take place.¹⁵ We can also consign to oblivion factional analysis of CCP politics – at least until Xi leaves the stage.

- Age norms by and large continue to be observed – with exceptions, such as Wang Yi, the Chinese Foreign Minister, whose espousal and promotion of Xi’s form of aggressive diplomacy has won his master’s trust. In a system which, beyond purge and death, has few mechanisms for removing incumbent leaders, age norms remain useful.
- The backgrounds of CC members reflect areas considered important by Xi. Thus 29 are linked to the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering. A number have rural and agricultural expertise. Xi has long emphasised the importance of science and technology and innovation, as well as rural revival and food security.
- In contrast to the 19th Party Congress, both the heads of the Ministry of State Security and the United Front Work Department are Politburo members. This too emphasises the importance Xi attaches to national security and to the United Front strategy (not least abroad).
- The number of female members of the CC increased by one, while ethnic minority members fell by seven. Neither are represented in the 24-man Politburo. Again this shows that representing Xi and his mission far outweighs a need for other forms of representation.

Is this picture of immense power and control by Xi contradicted by the lack of fulfilment of two strong pre-congress expectations, namely that the constitution would be amended to include the CCP catechism of the ‘Two Establishes’ (两个确立);¹⁶ and the simplification of ‘Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era’ to ‘Xi Jinping Thought’, which, it was argued, would put it on a level with ‘Mao Zedong Thought’?

¹⁵ For a consideration of why it is wrong to posit an important meeting at Beidaihe, see: Charles Parton, “‘Beidaihe meeting’: does it take place and does this matter?”, *Britain’s World*, 24/08/2022, <http://bit.ly/3Eff9Xt> (checked: 17/11/2022).

¹⁶ The ‘Two Establishes’ are: ‘To establish the status of Comrade Xi Jinping as the core of the Party’s Central Committee and of the whole Party’ and ‘To establish the guiding role of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era’. For a chronology of the appearance of ‘Two Establishes’ in CCP media, see: David Bandurski, ‘Two Establishes’, *China Media Project*, 08/02/2022, <http://bit.ly/3TAgwFK> (checked: 17/11/2022).

The answer is a clear ‘no’. We should not doubt the tightness of Xi’s grasp on power or the importance of the ‘Two Establishes’, which have been touted heavily since the 6th Plenum in November 2021 and were stressed throughout the congress and thereafter. As the *People’s Daily*, a CCP newspaper, put it:

The closing meeting of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China adopted a resolution on the “Constitution of the Communist Party of China (Amendment)”, requiring the whole party to deeply understand the decisive significance of the “two establishments”.¹⁷

This was again stressed at a CC press conference after the congress, when the Director of the Central Policy Research Office enumerated the six most important aspects of Xi’s report. Number one was ‘the major political achievements of “Two Establishes”’.¹⁸ Furthermore, on 29th October 2022, the CCP issued a ‘Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Conscientiously Studying, Propagating and Implementing the Spirit of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China’, which declared that:

“Two Establishes” are the major political achievement of the party in the new era, and the decisive factor in promoting the party and the country’s cause, enabling historic achievements and historic changes.¹⁹

Since then, every pronouncement of PBSC and Politburo leaders has majored on the ‘Two Establishes’.

Less clear is why the ‘Two Establishes’ did not enter the constitution. They partially overlap with the ‘Two Safeguards’, which have a longer pedigree and did enter the constitution this time.²⁰ Yet repetition is the sibling of reinforcement; and the CCP is not shy when it comes to hammering home its messages, so there was room for both. It seems safe to conclude that it was not Xi’s intention, rather

¹⁷ ‘让党旗在新征程上高高飘扬 – “中国共产党章程 (修正案)” 诞生记’ [‘Let the party flag fly high on the new journey – The Birth of the Constitution of the Communist Party of China (Amendment)’], *人民日报* [People’s Daily], 27/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3UEskIk> (checked: 17/11/2022).

¹⁸ “夺取新时代中国特色社会主义新胜利的政治宣言和行动纲领” – 中共中央举行新闻发布会解读党的二十大报告’ [“Political Declaration and Program of Action for the New Victory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era” – The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China held a press conference to interpret the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China’], *人民日报* [People’s Daily], 25/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3GtswWu> (checked: 17/11/2022).

¹⁹ ‘中共中央关于认真学习宣传贯彻党的二十大精神的决定’ [‘Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Conscientiously Studying, Propagating and Implementing the Spirit of the Twentieth National Congress of the Communist Party of China’], *人民日报* [People’s Daily], 31/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3UZrANJ> (checked: 17/11/2022).

²⁰ The ‘Two Safeguards’ are: ‘Safeguard the “core” status of General Secretary Xi Jinping within the CCP’ and ‘Safeguard the centralised authority of the Party’.



than that he did not have the power to ensure inclusion. Perhaps he is biding his time until the 21st Party Congress in 2027.

As for not shortening the long title of Xi's ideology to match that of Mao, again the explanation is unclear. But it may lie in his belief that it is important always to remind his people of the importance of 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' and in using 'the New Era' to underline that this is the third iteration of Marxism – the 21st century brand – which is Xi's crowning contribution and part of his legacy.

Ideology

Ideology matters. Xi says so, most pertinently perhaps in his assessment of the fall of the Soviet Union's communist party: a major reason was a lack of faith in Marxism. This is not an error Xi intends to repeat. He sees himself as the progenitor of a third phase of Chinese Marxism, '21st Century Marxism', which as the report and subsequent party commentaries mention, is a troika of 'the integrat[ion of] the basic tenets of Marxism with China's specific realities and fine traditional culture'.²¹

Ideology pervades Xi's form of governance. In the report it constitutes the first, and therefore, most important, section after the obligatory review of the achievements of the last five years. And it recurs throughout the report.

The section on culture leads off with ideology. This is so also in other earlier reports by Xi and top leaders (e.g., at the National People's Congress), but was not the case before Xi. Ideology's children, 'core social values', also now come second. In free and open countries ideology is more a matter of personal development. Not in the PRC: according to the 2017 amendment to the constitution culture is 'primarily socialist culture'. As Xi said in the report:

We should uphold the foundational system for ensuring the guiding role of Marxism in the ideological domain. We will ensure that culture serves the people and serves socialism...Guided by the core socialist values, we will develop advanced socialist culture, promote revolutionary culture, and carry forward fine traditional Chinese culture.²²

²¹ This phrase from Xi's report has become ubiquitous in the commentaries of Politburo members in their post-congress publicity.

²² 习近平 [Xi Jinping], '高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜同心协力为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而奋斗' ['Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects'], 中华人民共和国外交部 [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China], 16/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3V8bhvh> (checked: 17/11/2022), p. 34.

Ideology features for a third time in the final section on party building. Subsection two is entitled ‘Enhancing cohesion and forging the party’s soul with the Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era’. For Xi, forging souls – particularly of the young – through instilling ideology is a core concern.

At the end of the last three Party Congresses Xi has led the whole PBSC on CCP pilgrimages; in 2012 it was to the ‘Road to Rejuvenation’ exhibition in Beijing. This was followed in 2017 by a visit to the site in Shanghai where the first Party Congress was held in 1921. This year it was to Yan’an, the ‘holy site and cradle’ of the CCP, where in 1945 at the 7th Party Congress Mao Zedong gained recognition as undisputed leader of the CCP and his ‘Thought’ was adopted as the party’s guiding ideology.²³ The parallels for Xi are obvious. 1945 marked the end of the Yan’an rectification campaign within the CCP. That too will not have been lost on today’s cadres – the campaign rather than its ending. Yan’an also makes the point that ideology and political loyalty are intertwined. This is the message of the ‘Two Establishes’: Xi is the core and so is his ‘Thought’.

Welcome to the age of ideology. Domestically, officials must conscientiously study and apply the tenets of ‘Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era’. Furthermore, its effects will increasingly be felt abroad as Xi seeks to ‘globalise’ CCP values.

Party building

One can shape metal by pouring it into a mould or by forging it by force. Xi seeks to mould souls using ideology, but he has not neglected to hammer them into shape. He has embarked upon a wholesale reworking of CCP regulations, so that ‘among the nearly 4,000 effective intra-party laws and regulations, more than 70% have been newly formulated and revised in the past ten years’.²⁴

A significant part of a Party Congress is bound up with the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), both renewing its membership and setting its guiding policies. Xi’s report reaffirms the importance of combating corruption, but the wider question of discipline looms even larger. Leaders talk of

²³ ‘习近平在瞻仰延安革命纪念地时强调 弘扬伟大建党精神和延安精神 为实现党的二十大提出的目标任务而团结奋斗’ [‘When paying his respects at the Yan’an revolutionary memorial, Xi Jinping emphasised carrying forward the great spirit of party building and the Yan’an spirit, and to unite and work hard to achieve the aims and tasks raised at the Party’s 20th congress’], 新华社 [Xinhua], 27/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3TFifJS> (checked: 17/11/2022).

²⁴ ‘二十大新闻中心第二场记者招待会’ [‘The Second Press Conference of the Top 20 News Centers’], 新华社 [Xinhua], 17/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3tACsG6> (checked: 17/11/2022).

the problem which beset earlier Chinese dynasties: when they became divorced from the ideals and energy which marked their ascent, they declined and were eventually overthrown.²⁵ The ‘problem page’ of the report highlights this:

Inside the party, there were many issues with respect to upholding the party’s leadership, including a lack of clear understanding and effective action as well as a slide toward weak, hollow, and watered-down party leadership in practice. Some party members and officials were wavering in their political conviction. Despite repeated warnings, pointless formalities, bureaucratism, hedonism, and extravagance persisted in some localities and departments. Privilege-seeking mindsets and practices posed a serious problem, and some deeply shocking cases of corruption had been uncovered.²⁶

Xi’s response is threefold, elements all highlighted in the report: a richer diet of ‘Xi Jinping Thought’, more self-discipline, and greater discipline imposed by the CCDI. Thus, the report promised more ideological study for CCP cadres to ‘strengthen the ideals and convictions of our party members’ and that they ‘will apply what [they] have learned in practice’.²⁷

On self-discipline, the term ‘self-reform’ or ‘self-revolution’ (自我革命), has gained considerable currency in the last year.²⁸ Xi reinforced this during the visit of the PBSC to Yan’an after the congress when he said that ‘All comrades in the party should vigorously promote the spirit of self-reliance and hard work.’²⁹

²⁵ An example is in the interview with the head of the secretariat of the 20th Party Congress on the revision of the CCP constitution, see: ‘The person in charge of the secretariat of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China answered questions from Xinhua News Agency reporters on the “Constitution of the Communist Party of China (Amendment)” adopted by the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China’ [‘中国共产党第二十次全国代表大会秘书处负责人就党的二十大通过的“中国共产党章程(修正案)”答新华社记者问’], 新华社 [Xinhua], <http://bit.ly/3X8QUCG> (checked: 17/11/2022).

²⁶ 习近平 [Xi Jinping], ‘高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜同心协力全面建设社会主义现代化国家而奋斗’ [‘Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects’], 中华人民共和国外交部 [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China], 16/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3V8bhvh> (checked: 17/11/2022), p. 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

²⁸ It is referred to five times in the interview with the head of the secretariat of the 20th Party Congress, see: ‘The person in charge of the secretariat of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China answered questions from Xinhua News Agency reporters on the “Constitution of the Communist Party of China (Amendment)” adopted by the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China’ [‘中国共产党第二十次全国代表大会秘书处负责人就党的二十大通过的“中国共产党章程(修正案)”答新华社记者问’], 新华社 [Xinhua], <http://bit.ly/3X8QUCG> (checked: 17/11/2022).

²⁹ ‘习近平在瞻仰延安革命纪念地时强调 弘扬伟大建党精神和延安精神 为实现党的二十大提出的目标任务而团结奋斗’ [‘When paying homage to the Yan’an Revolutionary Memorial Site, Xi Jinping emphasised carrying forward the great spirit of party building and the Yan’an spirit to work together to achieve the goals and tasks proposed by the Party’s 20th National Congress’], 新华社 [Xinhua], <http://bit.ly/3TFifjS> (checked: 17/11/2022).

On discipline imposed by the CCDI, there will be no let-up in the pace of the last decade:

We will steadfastly implement the central party leadership's eight-point decision on improving conduct and see that leading officials, or the "key few", set an example for those below them. We will continue to tackle pointless formalities, bureaucratism, hedonism, and extravagance, with a focus on the first two.³⁰

On corruption, the report's last subsection on party building promises tough action against cadres at all levels, those whose families use their position for gain, and those who flee abroad.

Party building and strengthening is not only an internal affair, but also a matter of extending its control throughout the government and society. 80% of government officials and 95% of top officials are CCP members.³¹ Those few non-CCP members will be treated the same as members:

We must adhere to the principle of the party supervising officials...We will take political commitment as the primary criterion for selection and carry out solid vetting of officials' political commitment to ensure that they are politically reliable and corruption-free.³²

As mentioned previously, political commitment means adherence to 'Xi Jinping Thought' and to the 'Two Establishes' and the 'Two Safeguards'.

The ongoing process of strengthening CCP leadership in outside organisations is to be further ramped up, whether in state owned enterprises (SOE) and financial firms, or 'in mixed-ownership and non-public enterprises trade associations, academic societies, and chambers of commerce,...new types of economic and social organisations and among groups in new forms of employment.'³³ Interestingly, the *People's Daily* specifically pointed out that hospitals were added to the list of organisations in article 30 of the constitution

³⁰ 习近平 [Xi Jinping], '高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜同心协力为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而奋斗' ['Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects'], 中华人民共和国外交部 [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China], 16/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3V8bh9h> (checked: 17/11/2022), p. 55.

³¹ '身为共产党员, 这些党内权利你要知道' ['As a member of the Communist Party, you need to know these rights within the party'], 搜狐 [Sohu], 01/06/2021, <http://bit.ly/3tHtUxm> (checked: 17/11/2022).

³² 习近平 [Xi Jinping], '高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜同心协力为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而奋斗' ['Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects'], 中华人民共和国外交部 [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China], 16/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3V8bh9h> (checked: 17/11/2022), pp. 53-54.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

where CCP organisations are to be set up, presumably a reaction to the disclosures of Li Wenliang, the doctor in Wuhan who was reprimanded for alerting colleagues to a new coronavirus, and of other doctors during the initial Covid-19 outbreak.³⁴

The shadow hanging over this section on party building is the continuing failure of CCP cadres and officials to implement energetically and imaginatively central party directives. Longer hours of study and conformity to ideology, increased discipline, and oversight and strengthening of the CCP's tentacles throughout government and society is a stronger version of the medicine Xi has long prescribed to cure this malady. It has not proved effective over the past decade. It is doubtful that it will in the future.

Policy

Policy making in the next five years will take place in a PRC where Xi's control is stronger than before, where the leadership is steeped in his ideology (or must outwardly appear so), and where a strengthened CCP will play a more intrusive role in governance and society. The congress report talked of 'acute problems and challenges, which undermined the party's long-term governance, the security and stability of the country, and the wellbeing of the people'.³⁵ While this was a description, at times highly disobliging, of the PRC under Hu, it is also clear that ahead, both domestically and in foreign relations, lie tough times and much struggle, a word Xi uses with great frequency.

The economy

A congress report is not a detailed policy document; rather, it gives overall guidance for the next five years. It does not lay out prescriptions for the PRC's four most pressing economic problems: debt and the real estate market, demographics, water scarcity, and an inadequately educated workforce. Xi, in criticising the decade of his predecessor in power, refers again to the economy being 'beset by acute structural and institutional problems. Development was

³⁴ '让党旗在新征程上高高飘扬 – “中国共产党章程(修正案)” 诞生记' ['Let the party flag fly high on the new journey – The Birth of the Constitution of the Communist Party of China (Amendment)'], 人民日报 [People's Daily], 27/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3UEskIk> (checked: 17/11/2022).

³⁵ 习近平 [Xi Jinping], '高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜同心协力为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而奋斗' ['Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects'], 中华人民共和国外交部 [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China], 16/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3V8bhyh> (checked: 17/11/2022), p. 5.

imbalanced, uncoordinated, and unsustainable, and the traditional development model could no longer keep us moving forward.’³⁶ The 3rd Plenum of 2013 was meant to chart a route out of this cul-de-sac, but reform since has been limited: it has failed to rebalance from investment and exports towards consumption, or free the private sector from the shackles of Leninism.

There is little in the congress report section ‘Accelerating the Creation of a New Development Pattern and Pursuing High-Quality Development’ to suggest that when the next 3rd Plenum is held – in 2023 – it will reveal a marked change of direction (usually the plenum a year after the congress is devoted to the economy). The report seems to indicate more of the same. Xi repeats his emphasis on revitalising the rural areas. The promise on ‘Promoting high-standard opening up’ should be read in the context of the ‘dual circulation’ policy, whose essence can be translated as ‘domestic wherever possible, foreign where we must’. Also relevant is the contradiction between opening up and the call for self-reliance in science, technology and innovation (the contradiction is more apparent than real, given the nature of CCP reciprocity, in which the PRC will be open to what it needs, while expecting other countries to be open to the PRC).³⁷

Some foreign commentators have expressed concern at the removal of those at the top of the economic and financial organisations, many educated in free and open nations. But that may be missing the point. Leaving aside whether or not education in a free and open society is a requisite for success in governing the PRC’s economy, and passing over the question of whether those now leaving office have made marked progress in reform and opening up, economic reform must necessarily be limited by the nature of Leninism. The CCP cannot let go of economic levers. With money comes power, and if power must remain in the hands of the CCP, then so must money. Entrepreneurs, even heads of state owned enterprises, cannot be allowed to get too rich, because eventually that might lead to a demand for political power. As Chen Yun, ‘party elder’ and economics expert, said in the 1980s: ‘The cage is the plan, and it may be large or small. But within the cage the bird [meaning the economy] is free to fly as he wishes.’³⁸

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5. Emphasis added.

³⁷ ‘In terms of education and technology talents, we must adhere to the priority development of education, the self-reliance and self-improvement of science and technology’. See: ‘中共中央关于认真学习宣传贯彻党的二十大精神的决定’ [‘Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Conscientiously Studying, Propagating and Implementing the Spirit of the Twentieth National Congress of the Communist Party of China’], 人民日报 [People’s Daily], 31/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3UZrANJ> (checked: 17/11/2022).

³⁸ ‘Chen Yun’, Oxford Reference, undated, <http://bit.ly/3OkwNgZ> (checked: 17/11/2022).

‘Common prosperity’ and well-being of the people

Earlier this year, some observers wondered whether ‘common prosperity’ had gone off the political agenda. The congress made it clear it has not. In summarising the mission of the CCP, the report ‘defines Chinese modernisation’, of which the second of five elements is:

...the modernisation of common prosperity for all. Achieving common prosperity is a defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics and involves a long historical process. The immutable goal of our modernisation drive is to meet the people’s aspirations for a better life. We will endeavour to maintain and promote social fairness and justice, bring prosperity to all, and prevent polarisation.³⁹

This presents a big economic and social challenge for the CCP. Its legitimacy depends, firstly, on its implicit bargain with Chinese citizens that they will benefit from rising prosperity in return for a CCP monopoly of power and limits to their personal freedoms; and secondly, on the party ensuring a fairer society by reducing the inequalities between regions, urban and rural areas, and individuals. In autumn 2014 a vice minister at the International Liaison Department listed the need to reduce inequalities as one of the three greatest threats to the survival of the CCP.⁴⁰ The seriousness of intent has not changed, although the difficulties of achieving the aim are great. Faster and deeper reforms to the taxation system, to the hukou (registration which ties a person’s benefits to a particular city or location), land reform and more would achieve the goal of greater equality more quickly, but they have been difficult for the CCP to implement. Those difficulties may not be dissipated by strengthened control over the leadership, ideology or party. If the economy stumbles badly, failure to achieve ‘common prosperity’ and a greater degree of equality could lead to a diminution of trust in the CCP and even widespread instability.

³⁹ 习近平 [Xi Jinping], ‘高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜同心协力为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而奋斗’ [‘Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects’], 中华人民共和国外交部 [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China], 16/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3V8bhyl> (checked: 17/11/2022), p. 18.

⁴⁰ The author was present at the meeting.

Three new sections in the report that reveal more policy priorities

Science, technology and innovation

To achieve the ‘2nd centennial goal’, in essence to become the world’s pre-eminent superpower, requires a sustainable and bigger economy. To achieve this within the constraints of Leninism, Xi is looking to science, technology and innovation. If the PRC can dominate the new emerging technologies and the industries which will be spawned by them, it may be able to escape the trammels of a model which is ‘unbalanced, uncoordinated, and unsustainable’. Small wonder that what in the 2017 report was a subsection has been promoted in 2022 to stand on its own: ‘Invigorating China through Science and Education and Developing a Strong Workforce for the Modernisation Drive’. And small wonder that a large paragraph has been added to the constitution:

In leading the cause of socialism, the Communist Party of China must continue its commitment to economic development as the central task, and all other work must take an ancillary role and serve this centre. The party shall implement the strategy for invigorating China through science and education..... It shall give full play to the role of science and technology as primary productive forces, the role of talent as the primary resource, and the role of innovation as the primary force driving development, draw on advances in science and technology, improve the quality of the country’s workforce, and ensure higher-quality and more efficient, equitable, sustainable, and secure development of the economy.⁴¹

The focus is on innovation, much of it state driven. The importance of this thrust for scientific and technological pre-eminence cannot be overestimated. For other countries this will mean that there will be no let-up in the ‘Made in China 2025’ industrial policy, in the military civil fusion policy, in the acquisition of technology through pressure on foreign companies, in the recruitment of foreign based scientists and technologists, or in cyber intrusions and espionage.

Law based governance

The importance of this to Xi was shown by the 4th plenum in 2014, which focused on law based governance and by his setting up of a Commission for Overall

⁴¹ ‘让党旗在新征程上高高飘扬 – “中国共产党章程(修正案)” 诞生记’ [‘Let the party flag fly high on the new journey – The Birth of the Constitution of the Communist Party of China (Amendment)’], 人民日报 [People’s Daily], 27/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3UEskIk> (checked: 17/11/2022).

Law-based Governance. Xi has connected the reform of the judicial system and the building of a corpus of civil law with the need to ensure trust, protection and a lack of interference by officials in business and the market.⁴² His speech also made clear that with globalisation Chinese law should be better established to deal with cases when Chinese individuals and companies abroad encountered ‘disputes and legal issues’.⁴³ Xi referred to free and open countries imposing ‘long-arm jurisdiction’ (the phrase also appears in the congress report) on Chinese citizens. Part of the way to deal with this was through ‘the rule of law’.⁴⁴

For the CCP there is no contradiction between establishing law based governance and its declared position that the party is in control of the law. The centre reserves the right to interfere whenever it deems that its political interests are involved. Law based governance only goes so far, and certainly not to those who use human rights to attack the CCP.

National security

National security has long been a concern of Xi. In 2013, he set up a National Security Commission; he has passed a number of laws reinforcing national security. The CCP now talks of 16 areas. Unsurprisingly, national security now has its own section in the report, which declares that:

We must take the people’s security as our ultimate goal, political security as our fundamental task, economic security as our foundation, military, technological, cultural, and social security as important pillars, and international security as a support.⁴⁵

While food, energy, resources, cyber, financial and other forms of security are important, much weight is given to the need to ‘improve the level of public security governance, improve the social governance system, and resolutely safeguard national security and social stability.’⁴⁶ Developing the ‘Fengqiao

⁴² Xi Jinping, Speech: ‘为做好党和国家各项工作 营造良好法治环境’ [‘Creating a Good Legal Environment for Doing All the Work of the Party and the State Well’], Central Literature Publishing House, [中央文献出版社], 25/02/2022, <http://bit.ly/3UGNzbt> (checked: 17/11/2022).

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ 习近平 [Xi Jinping], ‘高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜 同心协力为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而奋斗’ [‘Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects’], 中华人民共和国外交部 [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China], 16/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3V8bhyl> (checked: 17/11/2022), p. 42.

⁴⁶ ‘中共中央关于认真学习宣传贯彻党的二十大精神的决定’ [‘Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Conscientiously Studying, Propagating and Implementing the Spirit of the Twentieth National Congress of the Communist Party of China’], 人民日报 [People’s Daily], 31/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3UZrANJ> (checked: 17/11/2022).

model' and improving 'grid-based management, meticulous services, and IT support' are euphemisms for tightening control and surveillance over society.⁴⁷ The last decade's moves to impose CCP control and content on education, the internet, culture, the press, religion and more are an advance towards totalitarianism. Party building means strengthening the CCP's involvement in the personal lives of more than just its 96 million members. As a revealing sentence in the report says, the CCP should use 'the party's own transformation to steer social transformation'.⁴⁸

This does not bode well for relations with free and open countries in the next decade: totalitarianism and liberalism are oil and water. It will add distance or grit to foreign relations and at the people-to-people, as well as the geopolitical, level.

Taiwan

CCP language on Taiwan has been getting tougher. Xi's January 2019 speech was a notch up, as were other documents such as the wording in the 2018 white paper on relations with the European Union (EU), or the August 2022 white paper on Taiwan.⁴⁹ The idea of 'no rejuvenation without reunification' which puts the deadline for unification at 2049, the end date of the '2nd centennial goal', is not new, but it is explicitly stated in the report. There was also a swipe at foreign interference.

While invasion or a full blockade are highly unlikely in the next decade and beyond, the next few years are likely to see a range of measures designed to increase the pressure upon the Taiwanese to accept that unification is 'inevitable and irresistible'.⁵⁰ Tensions will rise. And there will be more measures to discourage foreign countries and companies from increasing business and contacts with the island.

⁴⁷ An enthusiasm of Mao, which in essence gets the people to keep an eye on the people. For a short exposition, see: 'How Xi Jinping is mobilising the masses to control themselves', *The Economist*, 10/11/2022, <http://bit.ly/3AjkonS> (checked: 17/11/2022).

⁴⁸ 习近平 [Xi Jinping], '高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜同心协力为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而奋斗' ['Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects'], 中华人民共和国外交部 [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China], 16/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3V8bhYh> (checked: 17/11/2022), p. 51.

⁴⁹ '台湾问题与新时代中国的统' ['The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era'], *新华社* [Xinhua], 10/08/2022, <http://bit.ly/3Gw9zCH> (checked: 17/11/2022).

⁵⁰ See: Charles Parton, 'Taiwan: Invasion is not likely, but deterrence remains vital', Council on Geostrategy, 06/09/2022, <http://bit.ly/3hNh5P8> (checked: 17/11/2022).

What does the congress mean for the wider world?

The long-held basis of the CCP's foreign policy has been the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence'. They can be found in the CCP constitution. Similar benign professions pepper the congress report. But as Liu Xiaobo, a Chinese dissident and martyr, remarked, it would be wrong to assume that the CCP's behaviour abroad differs from what it is at home. Increasingly, it is a wolf in wolf's clothing.

The underlying message of Xi's views of the international environment is about future struggle, particularly with the United States (US). The tone is combative. This was echoed by Ding Xuexiang, newly promoted PBSC member, in yet another top leader's commentary on the congress:

From an international perspective, the world is undergoing rapid changes unseen in a century, the pandemic has far-reaching impacts, the global economic recovery is sluggish, various traditional and non-traditional security issues are intertwined, unilateralism, protectionism, hegemony, and similar threats have intensified, and hostile forces are deliberately blocking the historical process of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.⁵¹

To deal with this he prescribed an invigorated effort by the United Front at home and abroad, and to fight:

No matter how powerful the enemy is, how difficult the road is, or how severe the challenge, we must not be afraid or back down, and dare to fight and win. In the face of risks and challenges, it is not good to turn a blind eye, to avoid and retreat, and it is not good to walk around...in the face of all kinds of actions that smear the image of the party and the country and harm the interests of the country and the people, [we must] not have soft hands, but dare to fight, and we can win.⁵²

Xi's declaration that 'China opposes protectionism, the erection of "fences and barriers"', decoupling, disruption of industrial and supply chains, unilateral sanctions, and maximum-pressure tactics' may be rank hypocrisy – the CCP is

⁵¹ '为全面推进中华民族伟大复兴而团结奋斗(认真学习宣传贯彻党的二十大精神)' ['Unite and struggle for the comprehensive promotion of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'], 人民日报 [People's Daily], 02/11/2022, <http://bit.ly/3AlOh6O> (checked: 17/11/2022), p. 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*

guilty of most on the list – but it largely encapsulates US intentions in applying measures such as those adopted on 7th October 2022 to limit the PRC’s development of semiconductors.⁵³

So while the benefits of trade, investment and shared global commons mean that free and open countries should try to avoid struggle with the PRC, they need also to protect their interests better: against the United Front and Chinese interference; against the all-out assault on their science and technology; and against CCP efforts to undermine the open international order and the values which underpin it, something which has served the world well in the past 80 years.

A decade ago when Xi came to power it was still possible to believe that the CCP was not intent on exporting its systems and values to other countries. No longer. Of course, the CCP denies this, as did the deputy director of the Central Propaganda Department at the CC press conference to interpret the report: ‘We will never “export” China’s model, nor ask other countries to “copy” China’s practice.’⁵⁴ (This brings to mind the Chinese aphorism about the man who hides his silver in the ground and puts up a sign saying ‘300 taels of silver are not buried here’.) But that does not mean that the CCP is not keen to export elements of its system, such as surveillance networks, its industrial practices and above all its values.

The main message for free and open countries to take from the Party Congress is that they have to seek a difficult balance between cooperation with and defence against a CCP which hides behind its rhetoric of peaceful coexistence an intention to become by 2049 *the* leading superpower, and to change global governance so as to promote its interests and values. That is the meaning of the ‘2nd centennial goal’ or ‘rejuvenation’, which lies at the heart of Xi’s rhetoric and beliefs.

And finally...

Governing the CCP is a hard task and not one which lends itself to humour, a quality rarely ascribed to Xi. Yet one sentence from the report does raise a wan smile:

⁵³ ‘Fact Sheet: Chips and Science Act Will Lower Costs, Create Jobs, Strengthen Supply Chains, and Counter China’, The White House, 09/08/2022, <http://bit.ly/3TFZKFg> (checked: 17/11/2022).

⁵⁴ “‘夺取新时代中国特色社会主义新胜利的政治宣言和行动纲领’ – 中共中央举行新闻发布会解读党的二十大告” [“Political Declaration and Program of Action for the New Victory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era” – The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China held a press conference to interpret the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China’], 人民日报 [People’s Daily], 25/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3GtswWu> (checked: 17/11/2022).



It is of critical importance to the party's future that we have qualified successors to carry forward our cause.⁵⁵

There was no hint at the Party Congress of a successor to Xi. This may not be the only case in the next decade of 'Do as I say, not as I do'.

⁵⁵ 习近平 [Xi Jinping], '高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜同心协力为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而奋斗' ['Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects'], 中华人民共和国外交部 [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China], 16/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3V8bhyh> (checked: 17/11/2022), p. 54.



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