

The 18th Chinese Communist Party Congress and Xi Jinping

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Introduction

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) held the 18th Party Congress from November 8 to 15, 2012, which elected 205 members of the Party Central Committee from 2270 representatives. Following the Congress, the Xi Jinping administration was started as he took his office as General Secretary of the Party and also as Chairman of the Party Central Military Commission, and 25 members of Politburo of Party Central Committee and 7 members of the Politburo Standing Committee were elected at the 18th Party Congress 1st Plenum which was held in November 15.

This paper explores the policy direction of the Xi Jinping administration by analyzing the work report of the 18th Party Congress, and Xi's speech in his first month as General Secretary. The key for understanding its direction is the work report of the 18th Party Congress delivered by Hu Jintao in November 8. Since Xi Jinping, as the head of the drafting team, oversaw the drafting process of the report, it consisted of not only the concluding remarks of the Hu Jintao era, but also an indicator of the next 5 years.

Start of Xi Jinping Era

Xi as Nationalist-Reformer?

In his first month as the leader of China, Xi has repeatedly showed his commitment to nationalism and continuing reform policy. Xi led the other newly-elected members of the Politburo Standing Committee to meet the press on November 15. Xi stressed their responsibility to the nation, the people and the Party.

The fact that Xi first emphasized "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" among other things indicates his leaning towards nationalism and it seemed it was due to Xi's initiative that the work report unprecedentedly stressed "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation". According to Xi, "to realize the great renewal of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream for the Chinese nation in modern history". Following the Congress, on November 29, Xi and the other six members of the Politburo Standing Committee visited the exhibition "The Road towards Rejuvenation" at the National Museum of China. Xi emphasized that the biggest "Chinese dream" is "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" which embodies the overall interest of the Chinese nation. He also stated that "one's future and destiny are closely connected to those of the country and nation". What "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" concretely means is still unclear, but at least it is clear that Xi Jinping emphasizes nationalist appeal.

Xi is trying to demonstrate to the public that he will seriously address corruption problems, raise the efficacy of bureaucracy, and reform the economic structure. He visited Shenzhen in December 2012, which imitated Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour in 1992, to show his commitment to continue Reform and Open-door policy. He also set some norms such as "do not control traffic during inspection tours by cadres" or "do not read manuscripts at the meeting", which appears, to some extent, to be a bid for popularity.

Xi as Marxist-Conservative?

Despite his nationalist-reformer appeal, Xi faces limits if he wants to change the course of China

dramatically. First, Xi has inherited most of the ideological formation of successive leaders, which indicates he intends to follow his predecessors' basic policy line and it is very difficult for him to change basic concepts set by successive leaders.

The most frequent phrase to arise in the work report and other speeches was "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" (hereafter SCC). The phrase is in no way a new concept because it was invented by Deng Xiaoping in the 12th Party Congress in 1982 and it has been repeatedly used by the CCP leaders for describing their own country since then.

"Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" is a concept which describes China after the start of Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Open-door policy. The theoretical schemes for SCC are the concepts successive leaders invented, including the Deng Xiaoping theory, Three Represents and Scientific Development Concept. Now Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought are not SCC itself and therefore not the leading theory of contemporary China. Such logical manipulation has been introduced by Hu Jintao in the 17th Party Congress. Meanwhile, Xi did not forget to add that Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought are the bases of SCC and could never be abandoned.

The work report clearly stated that SCC is the best way to achieve national rejuvenation. It specified the goals of SCC as "completion of socialist modernization" and "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation". Xi has also interrelated SCC and national rejuvenation. He seems to be trying to invigorate the CCP by nationalist appeal.

Moreover, the "Scientific Development Concept", the main idea of the Hu Jintao era, was incorporated into the new Party Constitution. It stipulates that the Scientific Development Concept is "a guiding ideology that must be upheld and applied in developing socialism with Chinese characteristics" and "a scientific theory that is in keeping with Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory and the important thought of Three Represents and is in step with the times". Xi expressed that he would manage his administration under the guidance of the Scientific Development Concept.

Second, personnel and organizational factors can be seen as supporting factors to limit Xi's arbitrariness. Personnel and organizational arrangements for making the general outline into more concrete policy have not been completed yet. We have to wait at least until next March, when Xi takes the President's Office and the new State Council is organized. At first glance, given the facts that Hu didn't stay in the Central Military Commission and there are few members in the Politburo Standing Committee who are close to Hu, Xi seems to have a relatively larger free hand. But things are not so simple because, for example, five out of seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee are there for one term due to age limits, and allegedly the majority of the members of the Politburo are relatively close to Hu, though the factional factor is very elusive.

China's policy-making process has become more complex because many actors participate in the process, which indicates that it is difficult for leaders to change policy direction easily. For example, in the 18th Party Congress, representatives of central state owned enterprises (*yangqi*) got more power. Now six managers of *yangqi* were elected as full Central Committee members, an increase from only one five years ago. 52 representatives elected to the 18th Party Congress are from *yangqi*, an increase from 47, 5 years ago.

Foreign and Security Policy

As for foreign policy, though some analysts and journalists argue that Xi Jinping's diplomacy would be assertive and expansionist because he repeatedly stresses nationalism, there is little firm evidence that he is trying to change his predecessor's foreign policy fundamentally.

Regarding assessment of the international environment surrounding China, the report concludes that “China remains in an important period of strategic opportunities for its development, a period in which much can be achieved (*dayou zuowei*)”. The concept of a “period of strategic opportunities (*zhanlüe jiyuqi*)” was addressed by Jiang Zemin in the 16th Party Congress in 2002, and it means the first 20 years of the 21st century is a period in which China’s comprehensive national power can be enhanced and much can be achieved, because China would have a relatively stable international environment and it can continue its economic development. The basic condition for the judgment is that the US devoted its resources to the war on terrorism and was distracted from the Asia-Pacific. After 2011, there have been arguments in China that because the US has started to shift its attention to the Asia-Pacific, then the period of opportunity for China would meet its demise. But the concept has not changed in the report, which implies such arguments never prevail, though there are minor additional words that “we need to have a correct understanding of the changing nature and conditions of this period”.

Xi also inherited the concept of “peaceful development”, which was a central idea of the Hu Jintao era. According to Zhong Sheng’s article in the People’s Daily, it is an “intrinsic demand of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics”, and the article stressed that China’s rise and development would never pose a threat to other countries (*People’s Daily* Nov. 29). Xi also used his first meeting with foreign guests since his election to stress China’s commitment to peaceful development and its opening-up policy and expressed that “China will never seek hegemony or expansionism”. A related new concept incorporated in the report is a “new type of power relations”. This is a phrase Hu Jintao used in the US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue in May 2012, which means that China and the US should accept the reality that China has become a great power, respect mutual interests, and avoid the confrontation between a rising power and an existing power which has been repeated throughout the history.

Regarding security and military affairs, Xi again basically followed the concepts developed in the Hu era. The work report states that the strategic task of military modernization is “building strong national defense and powerful armed forces that are commensurate with China’s international standing and meet the needs of its security and development interests”, and “to accomplish the dual historic tasks of military mechanization and full IT application, striving to basically complete military mechanization and make major progress in full military IT application by 2020”. And it contends that because China’s interests have expanded and threats to China have also diversified, then China “should attach great importance to maritime, space and cyberspace security”. China will continue to strive to enhance the capability to accomplish a wide range of military tasks, the most important of which is to win a local war in an information age.

In short, Xi has not shown his own military and security policy yet. But one possible area he might emphasize is strategic missile force. He promoted Wei Fenghe, the newly appointed commander of the Second Artillery Corps, to general, and then he attended the Party Congress of Second Artillery Forces and urged for a drive in the “informatization” of the Second Artillery Forces. These moves may indicate Xi’s priorities.

Building Maritime Power

The report included the phrase “maritime power” and it attracts both domestic and foreign attentions, namely, it stated “We should enhance our capacity for exploiting marine resources, develop the marine economy, protect the marine ecological environment, resolutely safeguard China’s maritime rights and interests, and build China into a maritime power”. The phrase clearly tells us that the Party gives maritime issues higher importance than ever.

At the same time, however, one should notice that the phrases on maritime power are in the section of “Promoting Ecological Progress”, not in military, diplomacy or economy. What does it mean? We can at least say that it indicates that the maritime issue is not only concerning security but also involving economic interests or sovereignty, therefore many departments and institutions participate in the policy process.

It was the State Oceanic Administration (SOA) that responded to the phrase most enthusiastically. Right after the Congress, November 16, the SOA convened a conference on studying the 18th Party Congress, summoning managers of various levels from oceanic administration offices over the country. The conference cited the phrase related to maritime issues in the work report “40 characters outline” and participants held lively discussions on how to materialize the outline (*Zhongguo Haiyangbao* Nov. 17). The SOA is an organization which is managed by the Ministry of Land and Resources, and the Ministry is expected to play an important role in “Promoting Ecological Progress”. Therefore the fact that mention of maritime issues was incorporated in the “Promoting Ecological Progress” section may indicate that the SOA will play a bigger role in maritime issues.

It is also noteworthy that now China is striving to establish coordination between many departments related to maritime issues, and to create an integrated maritime strategy including views on protecting economic interests, sovereignty and security. Liu Cigui, the director of the SOA, following the Party Congress, claimed the need for “strengthening regular patrols and law enforcement activities, and improving coordination mechanisms between Maritime Surveillance (*Haijian*), Military and Diplomacy”, as well as marine exploitation, environmental protection and interest protection (*Zhongguo Haiyangbao* Nov. 28). Such coordination may proceed in the coming years.

Conclusion

Chinese politics has become more institutionalized and it is no longer in an age in which the personality of the paramount leader dictates all policies. Compared to Mao’s era, fundamental policy shifts need much time and more costs, so the range of policy choices has been narrowed. Therefore, despite Xi’s nationalist-reformer appeal, it is doubtful whether this will lead to a substantial change or not. At the same time, Xi has shown more of a populist tendency until now, and this may become a destabilizing factor for Chinese policies.

Regarding foreign and security policy, Xi is basically following Hu Jintao’s policy, at least for the time being, and various departments related to maritime issues will be invigorated because the work report for the Party Congress stipulated the importance of the maritime domain. We should see the developments in the establishment of an ocean basic law and the building of coordination mechanisms between related departments.

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