

Focus: The Xi Jinping Regime after the Party Congress (Summary)

Essay: An Examination of the Xi Jinping Regime in China: Perspectives on the 20th Party Congress

Ryosei Kokubun (Former President, National Defense Academy of Japan; Professor Emeritus, Keio University)

The greatest flaw in Chinese politics is the lack of rules for determining successors. As a result, there is always a power struggle prior to the Party Congress. Xi Jinping has achieved little in the way of results over the past decade — economic growth is slowing and relations with the U.S. are worsening — and he has achieved a certain degree of success only in the anti-corruption struggle. However, this was essentially a power struggle. This Party Congress was entirely centered on Xi Jinping, and the political report emphasized only his achievements. Nevertheless, the revised Party Constitution shows that the ban on personality cults remains in place, while reference to “Xi Thought”, the “Two Establishments” or the creation of a new Party chairmanship are not included, reducing the “Xi dictatorship” hue of the Party. Although Xi amended the Constitution to eliminate presidential term limits, he failed to change the Party’s internal regulations decided during the Hu Jintao era to limit all officials, including the Party General Secretary, to two terms. Former President Hu Jintao’s “dissatisfaction” may be related to this. The appointment of Politburo Standing Committee members ultimately involved inner-circle appointments of close aides only, and these realities seem to suggest that Xi’s hold on the Party is not necessarily rock-solid.

1 A Study on Xi Jinping’s Leadership Structure and Its Changes

Kazuko Kojima (Professor, Faculty of Law, Keio University)

Xi Jinping is a strong leader created to protect China from internal and external “enemies,” defend the system from rampant corruption, and rebuild the country under law and discipline, and his leadership style can be interpreted as “public-minded leadership” by a virtuous person. On the other hand, his pursuit of “strength” and his reliance on his own personal connections in personnel matters has discouraged many party and government leaders outside these reciprocal relationships and increased the risk that his leadership will be undermined from within the governing structure. In addition, the concentration of power and authority in Xi’s hands has led people whose lives and livelihoods have been threatened to turn on him in anger and hold him directly accountable, as the “White Paper Protests” that have emerged across the country have shown. The only way for Xi to overcome concerns about the personalization of power and create a success story as a virtuous guardian of the public good is to achieve economic stability and development and improve people’s welfare through his future governance.

2 “Chinese-style Democracy”: Competition or Coexistence of Political Systems?

Naoko Eto (Professor, Faculty of Law, Gakushuin University)

In December 2021, the Xi Jinping administration released a white paper on “Democracy in China (中国的民主),” attempting to theorize its oft-repeated assertion that China has its own approach to democracy suited to its national circumstances. Similarly, the “new political party system (新型政

党制度)” white paper issued on the political consultative system as a component of “Chinese-style democracy” critically compared it with the “old political party system” in the West. Although these arguments do not necessarily reflect the realities of China’s political system and do not conform to the existing logic of comparative politics, they have strategic significance diplomatically as the antithesis of the U.S. political system. This paper discusses the fictionality of these arguments and the effectiveness of this approach in foreign policy based on the Xi administration’s official position on “Chinese-style democracy”.

3 Will China’s Growth Strategy Be Recalibrated?:

Economic Challenges Awaiting the Xi Jinping Administration in its Third Term

Toshiya Tsugami (Visiting Fellow, Japan Institute of International Affairs; Contemporary China Researcher; President, Tsugami Workshop)

The Chinese economy is now suffering an acute case of economic stagnation caused by China’s zero-COVID policy and a more serious chronic case of a real estate crisis at once. Real estate and infrastructure construction have played major roles in the growth of China’s economy, but the costs of over-reliance on them are erupting in various aspects of the economy.

The Xi Jinping administration has repeatedly attempted to break away from a reliance on debt and investment but has failed each time. It has severely tightened credit in response to the real estate bubble since the summer of 2020, but this led to an unexpected plunge in macroeconomic growth since the second half of 2021 and, as in Japan after its own bubble burst, the Chinese government has been forced to use public finances to plug the holes since then.

Overinvestment and excessive debt over the years have distorted the distribution of wealth, resulting in a widening gap between the “haves and have-nots” and a failure to pass on more fruits of growth to the high-growth private sectors, which are the textbook causes of the middle-income trap. Drastic solutions to these problems will require painful reforms that will prove difficult to implement.

Xi Jinping called for pursuing “the Two Centenaries” and raising per capita GDP to the level of middle-income developed countries by 2035 at the twentieth Party Congress. But his third term administration is facing a situation in which sustaining growth is difficult.

4 A World Dividing into Blocs and China’s Global South Policy

Rumi Aoyama (Professor, Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University)

What are China’s foreign policy priorities and how is China, which adopts a non-alliance policy, deepening its relations with other countries? Is the world dividing into blocs? In order to elucidate these questions, this paper first analyzes the direction of China’s foreign policy as presented at the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party of China held in Beijing on October 16-22, 2022, and then clarifies the diplomatic developments of China’s foreign policy in recent years.

The current foreign policy has markedly departed from the omnidirectional diplomacy that followed the reform and opening-up policy. The Xi Jinping regime’s foreign policy is strongly ideological, and is based on cooperation with Russia and confrontation with Western industrialized countries. Against this backdrop, China has placed its policy priority on the Global South with the goal of defending the interests of developing countries. China is strengthening its relations with the countries of the Global South without creating alliances, and this relationship building is likely to make the conflict between democracy versus authoritarianism and dictatorships more evident in the future.

5 The 50th Anniversary of the Normalization of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and China: Is it Possible to Rebuild Constructive and Stable Relations?

Yuji Miyamoto (Chairperson, Miyamoto Institute of Asian Research; Former Ambassador of Japan to China)

The rise of China has become a major factor for change in the international community. The conflict between the U.S. and China, which has become more intense and protracted, should be viewed essentially as a traditional great power rivalry. Policy toward China must be built on the premise that China will continue to change. Sustained economic development remains vital to China, compelling the country to maintain the current international order while trying its best to modify this order to its advantage. Japan-China relations can presently be defined as a relationship of strategic reciprocity premised on the existing international order, with an additional and increasingly significant pillar of security featuring territorial disputes and a Chinese military buildup. While this security pillar is taking on even greater importance, we should recall that the current international order of the 21st century strongly demands cooperation on global issues and we should therefore seek greater cooperation and collaboration in other pillars such as diplomacy and economic affairs to restore balance to Japan-China relations. Diplomacy should play a vital role in the way that Japan and China contribute to world peace and development.