

Chinese Communist Party's 20th Congress: One-man show disrupted by a nobody

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Au Loong-yu discusses the conclusion of the CCP's 20th Congress and the cementing of President Xi Jinping's authority with his third term as leader.

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What was dramatic was that halfway through of the last day of the congress Hu Jintao, the former president of the country, was seen unwillingly led away to the exit of the hall, leaving a lot of puzzles behind. The [BBC reports](#) that:

The two most likely reasons for his departure are that it was either part of China's power politics on full display, with a leader representing a former time being symbolically removed, or that Hu Jintao has serious health problems.... However, if he was led away at the end because of ill-health, why did this happen so suddenly? Why in front of the cameras? Was it an emergency?

On Monday 24th, a further [news update](#) showed that before Hu Jintao was led away, his files were taken away by Li Zhanshu, the former member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo. When Hu tried to take back his files Xi Jinping called someone to his side and talked to the latter. Soon Hu was escorted away. This showed that the official explanation for Hu being escorted out of the hall was because he was unwell was untrue.

Reform from above always a myth

Certain liberal/neo-liberal dissidents, domestically or abroad, once argued that there was a struggle between the "reformist faction" and "conservative faction" within the CCP and put their hope of change on the former. Although without much proof, they put their hope in this or that party leader, for instance, Hu Jintao, only to be bitterly disappointed afterward.

After Xi Jinping took power in 2012, some continued to seek salvation in the premier Li Keqiang, but Li exhibited no signs of fighting against Xi. Despite this, when the Taiwan newspaper United Daily News [reported](#) in this August (soon withdrawn) about a supposed "insider's news" that while Xi would get his third term as president of the country and also as chairman of its Military Commission, Li would be promoted to the post of party secretary. This suspicious report again raised hope among many, but soon got disappointed again.

At least since 1989, we see no circumstantial evidences that serious political factions have formed within the party leadership. Political factions would require a more coherent ideology or agreement over basic principles. In contrast, there have always been cliques around individual leaders, and because of this there must have been differences in approaches, but these are not political factions, at least not yet. Cliques fight among themselves for power or over certain decisions yet to be made.

There have been three most powerful cliques since 1989, each grouped around a successive top leader; Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. It seems that, however, they have no serious difference over one basic principle among themselves - the party must tighten its screws over the whole nation further in its rapid rising up, even if some of them, in different periods, might opt for a slightly more dovish version.

Whereas the two predecessors of Xi might tolerate, in practice, individual dissidents (as long as they are not very well known), Xi's more hawkish approach went so far as to ban this as well. Regardless the small differences, all three share a consensus of never allowing an organized opposition to exist, either realistically or potentially, because this is the first prerequisite of their Orwellian state.

Xi's red gene and his blue blood cronies

Xi's third term does signify new development however. The congress passed the Resolution on Party Constitution amendments according to which "the congress resolved that another amendment, which enshrined "developing fighting spirit, strengthening fighting ability", be added to the constitution. The resolution further elaborated the point saying:

By adding this point, it would encourage the whole Party's historical self-confidence...and helps to pass down its red genes.

The term "passing down the party's red genes" had already been used multiple times in the past ten years by the party or Xi himself. This congress reiterating the same term signifies a dangerous trend, since 2012, is now finally consolidated by Xi's third term - the "second red generation" taking over all power by building an autocracy around Xi.

Xi began his first term in an unfavourable situation compared to his predecessors. Both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao were appointed as top leader by two very powerful leaders, namely, Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun, in that order (with Chen nominating Jiang and Deng, Hu). It is this which earned Jiang and then Hu the CCP's style of "legitimacy" - being blessed by Deng or Chen.

Xi, in contrast, was selected as Hu's successor, for the first time, by 400 top party leaders in 2007 because by then both Deng and Chen were long dead. According to a Japanese reporter from the Asahi Shimbun (well known for its connection to insiders news in China), Hu invented this CCP-styled "election" with his agenda to get Li Keqiang elected as top leader, but was sabotaged by Jiang Zemin who got enough votes for Xi instead. Jiang's success was based on Xi's special advantage over Li however - Xi is the "second red generation", hence genzhengmiaohong (which basically means "blue blood"), while Li is not.

How far this is true is unclear, but what we do know is that after the fall of the Berlin wall the most reactionary old leading cadres had tried very hard to pass their power to their children, with the pretext that only this measure could enable the party to survive in a period when the Soviet bloc was collapsing, claiming the "children of the revolutionary cadres would never betray their parents". Their plan worked quite successfully.

In 2007 the “second red generation” and their cronies (themselves not necessarily blue blood) first succeeded in transforming themselves into a “revolutionary aristocracy” and “kingmakers”. Since 2018 they further succeeded in overthrowing the rule laid down by Deng Xiaoping that the top leader of the nation could only serve two terms.

With the 2022 party congress they, through Xi’s dictatorship, are now able to grasp all power in the country, at the expense of other ruling cliques. If there is one single moment which symbolises this event, it would be the moment when ex-President Hu Jintao was shown the door of the congress hall, unceremoniously bundled out by officials.

Forget about all illusions of “gradual reform from within the establishment”. Xi will only further deepen and refine the Orwellian state. From his perspective, this is even more necessary now the economy is encountering serious problems. Any democratic transformation has to come from the toiling classes. Yet, with such a level of state control it is very difficult for social protest to rise up and to sustain itself. The severe lockdown under Covid pandemic which resulted in widespread violation of basic human rights (like locking up people in their own homes), and the fear of repression in general, has also created a very depressed mood across Chinese society.

Peng’s one man protest

But this Congress will go down in history forever with a single person protest as its backdrop,. It was another and earlier moment which symbolizes the people’s hatred against Xi and his red gene buddies. On the morning of 13 October, Peng Zaizhou, or Peng Lifa, staged a one-man protest at the Sitong bridge in Beijing (see [report](#)). He is reportedly a science and technological worker.

He hung two banners over the bridge, one with the words “We want food, not PCR tests. We want freedom, not lockdowns. We want respect, not lies. We want reform, not a Cultural Revolution. We want a vote, not a leader. We want to be citizens, not slaves,” The second banner was even more radical, calling for “boycott of schools, strikes to oust the dictator, traitor Xi Jinping.” He called for a day of action on 16 October. Nothing happened on that day, rather he was arrested on the day of his protest.

On top of hanging banners he also posted a detailed “action program” and a “toolkit” for political actions. He called for a “non-violent and popular colour revolution” - not to topple the CCP regime but to oust Xi Jinping. His ambition was that a reformed government would do the following:

- introduce party democracy to allow the election of party leaders
- implement (national wide) universal suffrage
- restrict the power of the government
- lift the ban on organisation political parties
- disclose officials’ personal assets and saving
- protect the market economy

Peng makes reference to Liu Xiaobo and his “[Charter 08](#)”, showing he is following in the footsteps of Liu’s liberal programme. What is different from Liu is that the latter was never keen on agitating for strikes and widespread social protests. In general, after the crackdown on the 1989 democratic movement, both the liberal and the “new left”, although bitterly opposing each other, shared the common ground of rejecting the working people as the agent of social change altogether. Instead they saw social protest as dangerous in general so reform must come only through the party. This leads both sides to see themselves as merely lobbyists of the CCP.

Liu was a bit different because he went on to publicly campaign for a liberal/neo-liberal

transformation (prioritising “market reform” over the struggle for democracy however) and because of this he was jailed and later died in prison. Liu had not publicly agitated for national strike to bring down the top party leader – this difference between the two men makes Peng quite special.

Calling for strikes and public attacks on the top leader are very serious crimes in China. Demanding the disclosure of officials’ personal assets is also a slap on the face for Xi – he was just boosting his “overwhelming victory” on eradicating corruption to the Congress. Peng’s demand for the disclosure of officials’ personal assets would expose Xi’s hypocrisy – isn’t this measure a more efficient way of getting rid of corruption than executing corrupt officials?

Voices from below

Peng himself must have prepared for the worst to come to him when he started his plan of action that day. But what is worth attention is not only this brave act. Once the pictures of his banner was posted in social media (the only outlet where the public could voice out now, even if they only last a very short period of time), it was echoed by many netizens. Soon the support for him was further spread to Hong Kong and other parts of the world, where college students, especially those Chinese overseas students, began to reposting Peng’s banners.

All these actions of re-posting Peng’s slogans ended in a few days. Below are three online posts from people on the Mainland that are worthwhile quoting at length:

Qianfenghugang:

This valiant effort is excellent, but not many people will response to his call and take to the streets....I am now studying in a college, people around me do nothing but focus on their lessons provided by the communist bandit university, and play online games when they are free. Take the lock down in the campus as an example, they are frustrated by the lock down, but no one came out to protest. People who did that, or just sending letters to the president of the university’s email address (to complain), would be punished....

The communist bandits use examination as a measure to control the students there – who do not have much free time to concern about the social events. People may break the campus regulation, or act against the counsellors there, but the campus and the counsellors have the power to punish them as well..... I am not interested in the curriculum, and I hate the campus’s highly repressive way of management, and every day I have been thinking of all kinds of things in relation to China. If ever there are people willing to mobilise and charge, , against the tower offline (acting against the authorities in real life – Au), I will come out in support of them.

Piaoliushe:

He (Peng) is not the first person.... to demand freedom. Several months ago there were big charges against the tower in Shanghai, Zhejiang, Yiwu and Wuhan. They were all eventually brought under control, but these will not be the last. The rapid economic downturn is visible, and the instability entails expensive cost to maintain stability, and there is always an upper limit to this kind of spending. For those who want to resist, do so. For those who do not have the courage to resist, they can at least tangping (literally “lying flat”, a popular counter culture in relation to the official ideology, for instance boycotting the life style of working hard to climb up the social ladder—Au),

refuse to comply, decline to consume and to work hard, refuse to get married and have children, so as to accelerate the collapse of this rotten society.

Fameidebaozi:

I am in despair about people like Li Keqiang (former premier) and Wang Yang (former member of the Standing Committee of the Politbureau). Surely we should not have cherished any stupid hope in anyone inside the Communist party in the first place. Anyone wants change must bleed oneself to do it..... My previous stupid idea is simply a joke.

A reactionary clique promoting 'modernisation'

Xi boasts of his success over controlling the Covid pandemic and vows to continue his zero Covid policy. It is true that Covid is under control. The party is good at delivering results if by results you mean imposing control - it is a control freak. It has perfected its tools of social and political control since 1949, and they have now been upgraded to a 21st century digital version.

Yet it also faces a dilemma. Its commitment to industrialisation and modernisation allows it to significantly improving its grip over the country and enrich itself from this. But on the other hand the same process is raising the cultural level of the country, empowering people to communicate immediately over great distances, allowing a bigger proportion of people to be increasingly aware of the crimes of the party. Since the lockdown over Covid even the middle class is beginning to question the legitimacy of the party.

Another dilemma the party now faces is that its modernisation project is led by a ruling clique which still carries strong pre-modern political culture - an incredibly arrogant top leader and slavish conformism for all those under him (of course never a "she"). This constitutes the best recipe for making great mistakes.

Take the lockdown policy as an example. Xi's success in 2021 has long turned sour. Lockdown should only be the first step in dealing with a pandemic. It is meant to buy time for the invention and mass production of an effective vaccine, and to earn the trust of the public. In these two endeavours Xi failed miserably. Managing a modern society without unnecessary pain and social cost is much more complicated than imposing control, but the former is something that Xi is ignorant of.

Now his overdoing of the lockdown has resulted in the backlashes of widespread discontent, no wonder Peng's first slogan "we want food, not PCR tests" won the heart of many people.

A second backlash is that when more and more countries have been opening up after vaccinating a great majority of the population, China still closes its door. The fact is that the domestically produced vaccine does not work well, and people do not trust the party. Even if Beijing chooses to open up China in the future this could be dangerous to people's health. On the other hand, continuing a zero Covid policy will further hit the economy hard. But Xi and his "second red generation" continues to believe in their omniscient. Precisely because of this, China is now entering the most dangerous period.

Au Loong-yu

P.S.

- Anti*capitalist Resistance. 25 Oct 2022:

<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/one-man-show-disrupted-by-a-nobody/>

- Au Loong-yu is a leading global justice and labour campaigner. His most recent book is China's Rise: Strength and Fragility (Merlin Press, 2012). He is one of the founders of Globalization Monitor, a Hong Kong based group which monitors China's labour conditions.