Twentieth Congress of the CCP, wave of social unrest in November 2022, and the future of China

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The 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was held between October 16th and October 22nd, 2022. The Chinese bourgeoisie and the state entered this congress under rapidly deteriorating domestic and international conditions. The slowdown of the Chinese economy due to the impact of the third great depression of the world economy that began in 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic that started at the end of 2019, along with the increasing economic and geopolitical tensions between China and advanced capitalist, i.e., imperialist, powers are putting increasing pressure on the CCP leadership. Xi Jinping, who sees the path to overcoming these problems in a personality cult-based dictatorship, managed to get elected as the General Secretary for the third time. Thus, just like Mao Zedong, he opened the way to stay in power until death. However, as labor and social unrest erupted across the country immediately after the 20th Congress, Xi's victory did not offer a magical key to solving the enormous problems facing the People's Republic of China (PRC). The escalation of tensions between China and imperialism could lead to a nuclear war and plunge humanity into disaster. A prolonged stagnation of the Chinese economy could provide significant opportunities for the struggles

of Chinese workers and oppressed people, which seem to have been temporarily subdued by Xi's repressive policies but have shown signs of resurgence immediately after the congress. This article goes beyond a standard congress analysis and points out positive and negative possibilities for the future. It starts with a balance sheet of the problems that Xi encountered when he became the CCP General Secretary and the PRC President a decade ago. The article then examines whether Xi's actions have provided a remedy for these issues. Then, it encapsulates the congress process and decisions. Based on this analysis, the article concludes by drawing attention to the risks and opportunities facing the workers and oppressed people of China and the world.

China before Xi Jinping

The rise of labor unrest

Between 2002 and 2012, China was governed by Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao duo. They handed over their positions to Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang in the 18th Congress of the CCP, held in November 2012. The Hu-Wen era witnessed three interconnected significant developments.

The first development was the rise of the Chinese proletariat, which extracted significant concessions from capital. The composition of China's industrial proletariat dramatically changed during the capitalist restoration from 1978 on. A large labor force willing to accept precarious and low-paying jobs was needed to attract foreign capital and support the native bourgeoisie that emerged from within the CCP bureaucracy. It was challenging to impose these conditions of servitude on the urban proletariat, which had a relatively strong class consciousness and capacity for struggle inherited from the Maoist era. Therefore, the household registration (*hukou*) system, which had hindered rural-to-urban migration, was relaxed. The number of "peasant workers" increased from 67 million in 1985 to 150 million in 2000, reaching 285 million in 2017. Based on this enormous supply of cheap labor from the countryside to the cities, domestic and foreign capital earned tremendous profits in the 1980s and 1990s.[1]

Furthermore, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, many large state-owned enterprises (SOEs) were restructured or privatized. Approximately 50 million workers, who previously enjoyed job security, relatively satisfactory wages, and decent employment-based welfare rights and services, were laid off because of privatization.[2] Despite facing significant resistance, especially from the workers in Northeastern provinces, the privatization policy was implemented. This restructuring process might have faced much more severe difficulties without the

1 Burak Gürel and Mina Kozluca, "The Unrest and Relative Empowerment of the Working Class in Contemporary China," *METU Studies in Development*, vol: 46, no: 2, 2019, p. 205.
2 Burak Gürel, "Dünya Kapitalizminin Krizi ve Çin'in Yükselişi," *Devrimci Marksizm*, no: 13/14, 2011, p. 26.

flow of millions of migrant workers to the cities.[3] In short, the process of capitalist restoration was completed thanks to the presence of a massive migrant labor force, and it was on their shoulders that it primarily relied upon.

From left to right: Hu Jintao, Li Keqiang, Xi Jinping, Wen Jiabao (March 17, 2013)

On the other hand, the second generation of migrant workers who entered the workforce in the late 1990s and early 2000s waged struggles to change the conditions of exploitation they faced. Despite the ban on forming unions other than the party-state-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions and all forms of state violence and repression, migrant workers established factory committees, NGOs, and solidarity networks, leading to thousands of extra-legal strikes and protests. As seen in the uprising in the Zengcheng district of Guangzhou province in June 2011, the actions of workers and the oppressed sometimes transformed into brief mass uprisings.[4]

In response to rising labor militancy, the Hu-Wen administration used a mixture of repressive and conciliatory measures. In addition to mobilizing the police to suppress strikes and demonstrations, the Hu-Wen administration sometimes approved and even encouraged capital to provide material concessions to the workers. In 2008, the Labor Contract Law was enacted, bringing some improvements to the social rights of migrant workers. Although there was pressure on labor NGOs, they were not outright banned. Additionally, to prevent workers' radicalization, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions was strengthened, and it was allowed to intervene in (at least) some of the workers' struggles to secure pro-labor concessions.[5]

3 Isabella Nogueira and Hao Qi, "The State and Domestic Capitalists in China's Economic Transition: From Great Compromise to Strained Alliance," *Critical Asian Studies*, vol: 51, no: 4, 2019, p. 563.
4 "Çin'de Sınıf Mücadelesi Sertleşiyor," *Gerçek*, no: 21, July 2011, p. 11.
5 Gürel and Kozluca, pp. 216-218.

As a result of these efforts, real wages in China increased much faster than in the rest of the world. Each new gain sparked further struggles, leading to a continuous cycle of workers fighting for better rights and conditions.

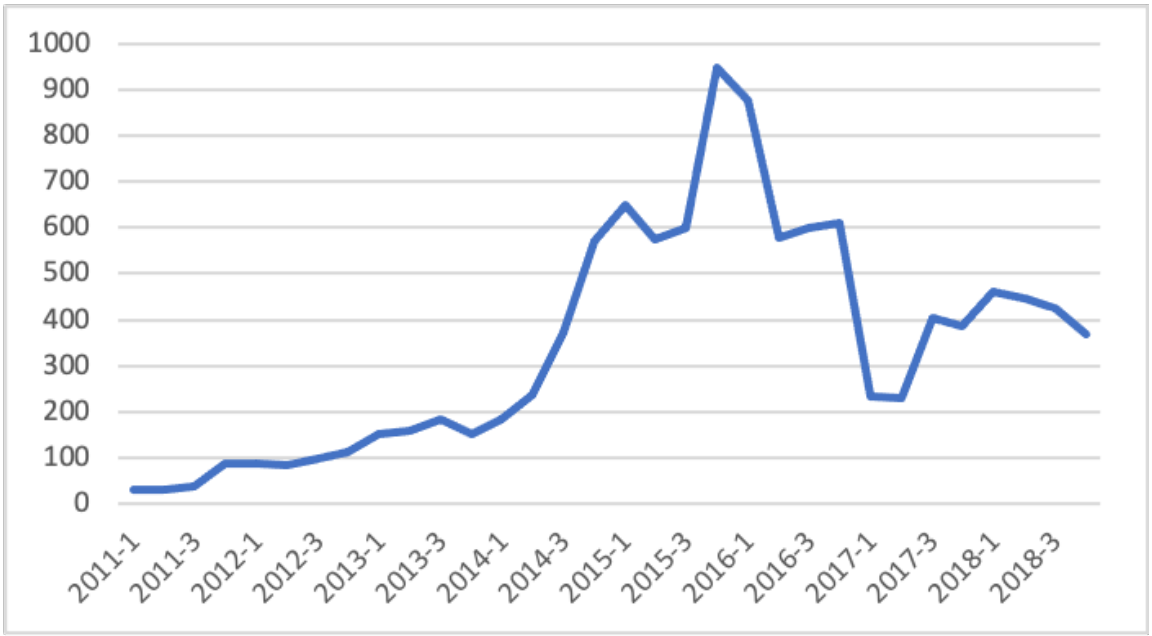

Figure 1. Strikes and other forms of labor unrest in China, 2011-2018[6]

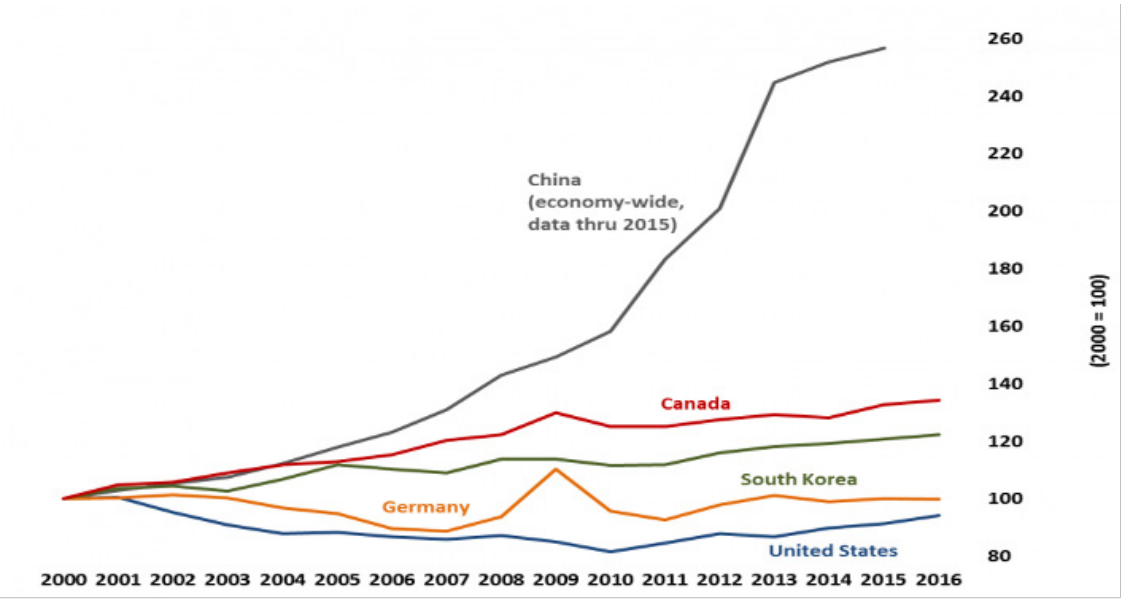

Figure 2. Indexed unit labor costs in China, Canada, Germany, South Korea, and the United States, 2000-2016 (2000=100)[7]

6 Ibid., p. 211 (The table displays quarterly figures for each year).
7 https://acetool.commerce.gov/cost-risk-topic/labor-costs (accessed March 1, 2019).

The Hu-Wen administration also made significant concessions to the rural population. To appease the rising peasant struggles in the 1990s, the CCP (under Jiang Zemin's leadership) promised to abolish agricultural taxes and fees and compulsory rural labor practices. The Hu-Wen administration fulfilled this promise in 2006. In the same year, the "Building a New Socialist Countryside" campaign was launched, leading to increased agricultural incentives and subsidies. The compensation paid for rural land acquisitions (to supply land to industrial, real estate, and agribusiness capital) also increased during this period.[8]

These measures were aimed at addressing some of the grievances of the rural population and enhancing the socialist rural development narrative. However, it is necessary to note that while these policies brought some relief to the rural population, they also had limitations and did not fully address the broader structural issues faced by the rural communities in China. Despite these concessions, rural-urban income disparities, land dispossession, and social inequality remained persistent.

The effects of the Third Great Depression

The high-speed growth of the Chinese economy from the 1980s to 2008, often with double-digit annual figures, formed the material basis for the concessions given to workers and peasants during the Hu-Wen era. However, the onset of the third great depression of the world economy in 2008 put enormous pressure on the Hu-Wen administration. As Western imports from China suddenly decreased, around 25 million migrant workers were laid off in export-oriented industrial zones, especially in the Guangdong province, in October 2008.[9] Those layoffs triggered a significant increase in labor protests. After the 2008 crisis, there was a noticeable tendency towards left-wing radicalization among the youth, with the idea of communism (primarily Maoism but also other Marxist currents) becoming popular again.

To maintain economic and political stability, the Hu-Wen administration unveiled a 586-billion-dollar stimulus package in November 2008 to revitalize the economy. This amount was equivalent to 12.5% of China's national income and three times the amount spent by the United States for the same purpose. When the expenditures made by state-owned banks and local governments were added, state spending to boost the economy reached 27% of the national income in 2009.[10] Large-scale infrastructure investments were made nationwide, especially in relatively poor Western provinces. Additionally, the debts of many companies were deferred or written off. The state capitalist characteristics of the Chinese political economy, defined by the state's dominance in critical sectors such as banking, energy, and telecommunications, helped the PRC to maintain significant economic planning and implementation capacity, making these policies relatively successful. As a result, China rapidly recovered and became the economy least affected by the depression,

8 Burak Gürel, "Çin'in Yükselişinin Tarihsel Arka Planı ve Yakın Geleceği," in *Çin Bilmecesi: Çin'in Ekonomik Yükselişi, Uluslararası İlişkilerde Dönüşüm ve Türkiye*, edited by Mustafa Yağcı and Caner Bakır, İstanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2019, pp. 38-39.
9 Ibid., p. 37.
10 Christine Wong, "The Fiscal Stimulus Programme and Public Governance Issues in China," *OECD Journal on Budgeting*, vol: 11, no: 3, 2011, p. 2.

and its dynamism helped the global economy to avoid a total collapse.[11]

Indeed, the Hu-Wen administration created a false spring and showcased a positive economic performance through stimulus and rescue packages. Moreover, the material concessions mentioned earlier allowed it to gain a certain level of sympathy from workers and peasants, albeit short of a strong hegemony. However, despite the appearance of economic recovery, fundamental problems remained unsolved. The presence of numerous zombie companies that remained afloat with state support and the enormous cost incurred by the banking sector indicated that the so-called recovery was more of a postponement of the crisis rather than a genuine and lasting revival. Hence, as Xi took over in 2012, the Hu-Wen duo left him with an economic crisis ticking bomb waiting to explode. The postponement of the crisis might have provided temporary relief, but it also raised concerns about the sustainability of such policies and their potential long-term consequences. Addressing the structural economic problems, dealing with unprofitable and non-performing businesses, and managing the risks associated with non-repayable loans were significant challenges the new administration, led by Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, faced.

Growing contradictions between the semi-peripheral China and imperialism

The increasing economic and geopolitical competition between China and imperialist states was another major problem Xi inherited from the Hu-Wen duo. The PRC has been one of the few countries that could improve its position in the world economic hierarchy and move up the ladder in the entire age of imperialism, which started in the late 19th century and is still ongoing. In 1960, China's per capita income was almost the same as India's and less than one-fifth of Turkey's. In 2021, China's per capita income was more than five times that of India and 30% above Turkey's.[12] In other words, China made a great leap from the periphery to the semi-periphery of the world system. However, there is a difficult gap to close between China and the imperialist economies. China's current per capita income is less than one-fifth of that of the United States, one-fourth of that of Britain, and one-third of that of Japan.[13]

Even if the gap between China and imperialism never closes, if China, a giant country with a population of 1.4 billion, continues rising in the decades to come, the economic dominance of the West may vanish. From the point of view of Western imperialism, the joining of Taiwan and South Korea, which are small in population and territory and have been under the military-political umbrella of the USA since the 1950s, to the imperialist club was a welcome development that could be managed without disrupting the inter-imperialist balance significantly. However, from the

11 Sungur Savran, *Üçüncü Büyük Depresyon: Kapitalizmin Alacakaranlığı*, İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2022 (2nd edition), pp. 35, 108-109.

12 https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=ZG-CN-IN-TR (accessed October 10, 2022).

13 https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?end=2021&locations=CN-GB-US-JP&start=2021
(accessed October 10, 2022).

same perspective, repeating the same success by a giant and autonomous power like China looks like an unwelcome development that must be prevented at any cost. The systematic efforts of the Chinese state to close the scientific and technological gap between China and the West frighten the imperialist camp. Overjoyed to exploit China's cheap and semi-skilled workforce, American companies lobbied for good relations with China in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, as the competitiveness of Chinese companies started to increase dramatically thanks to government support, many large American companies changed their stance and started to demand hawkish policies against China.[14]

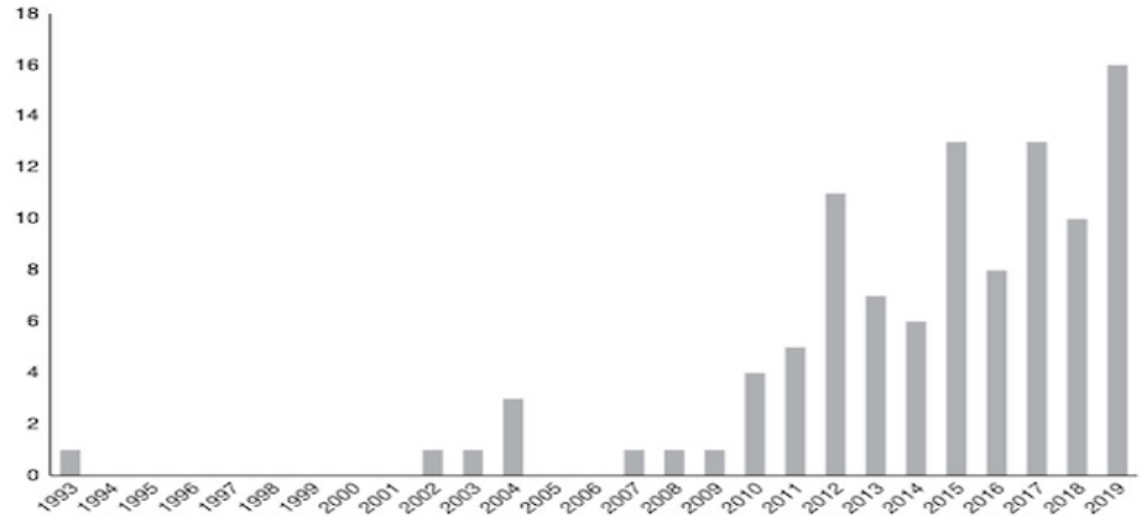

Figure 3. Count of US corporate lawsuits against Chinese entities on intellectual property issues in US Courts, 1993–2019[15]

After the onset of the third great depression, the economic competition among imperialist powers and between them and China intensified. The geopolitical implications of this competition began to manifest during the Hu-Wen era. Tensions escalated between China and the West on various issues, such as Taiwanese independence, territorial disputes in the South China Sea, the status of Hong Kong, and the national questions concerning Uyghurs and Tibetans.

When Xi Jinping took over, these issues were already at the forefront of his agenda. He inherited a complex and challenging geopolitical landscape, with tensions and competition between China and Western powers reaching new heights. Xi's leadership capacity would be critical in navigating these delicate issues and determining China's stance in the face of international pressures.

The disputes over territorial claims, human rights issues, and regional power struggles would continue to shape China's relations with other countries and

14 Ho-fung Hung, *Clash of Empires: From "Chimerica" to the "New Cold War"*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp. 8-47.
15 Ibid., p. 37.

influence the dynamics of global politics during the Xi era. As the leader of China, he was responsible for handling these issues while maintaining economic growth and political stability.

Divisions within the Chinese bourgeoisie

The factors mentioned above have created significant divisions within the Chinese capital. During the post-1978 "reform and opening up" era, mainland/indigenous capitalists accumulated significant fortunes thanks to vast reserves of low-cost and semi-skilled labor and access to cheap land (almost free in industrial zones like the Pearl River Delta) based on the local governments' firm control over land. The strong global demand for cheap Chinese goods, especially from Western countries, supported this capital accumulation. While the Chinese government occasionally emphasized the importance of indigenous innovation, local companies were not yet competitive in high-tech production on the global stage, particularly against Western, Japanese, and South Korean firms. Instead, in the 1980s and 1990s, China followed the "Technology Trade Market" strategy based on importing Western technology. While indigenous technology projects of the Mao era (such as the Shanghai Y-10 aircraft) were canceled, foreign technology companies' entry into the Chinese market and foreign-local partnerships were encouraged. This strategy aimed to enhance local companies' technological capabilities but failed to achieve this goal. Foreign companies used local partners to manufacture their products in China quickly and inexpensively without transferring significant research and development (R&D) capacity to their Chinese partners. The lion's share of profits from production chains went to foreign companies, leaving only crumbs for local firms.[16]

This harmonious yet unequal partnership between Chinese and imperialist capital began to break down in the 2000s. Rising labor costs due to successful labor movements in China, coupled with the subordinate position of local companies in production chains, squeezed local firms with already low profit margins. As a result, China's capital accumulation strategy based on low wages and cheap exports reached its limits. To solve this deadlock, a new fraction of Chinese capital emerged, aiming to improve its position in global value chains by enhancing research and development (R&D) capabilities, thereby increasing its share of the profit pie (at the expense of imperialist capital). At the same time, due to the reluctance of foreign capital to share technology with their local partners, the Chinese government shifted away from its "Technology Trade Market" strategy and began prioritizing self-sufficiency. The intensifying global competition among different countries' capitalists after the 2008 crisis further accelerated this trend.[17]

As the experiences of a few countries that have risen from the periphery to the center of the world system have shown, developing high technology and becoming competitive is costly and risky. It requires patience and long-term planning; hence, it is not a goal the private sector can achieve without significant state support. As

16 Nogueira and Qi, pp. 567-571.
17 Ibid., pp. 570-571.

I noted above, the Chinese state has maintained significant intervention capacity by excluding key sectors from privatization. During Hu Jintao's tenure, the state promoted domestic technology production through public-private partnerships. The "Indigenous Innovation" program launched in 2006 was a critical milestone. Mega-projects involving several ministries provided significant economic, scientific, and technological support to both state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and selected private companies like Lenovo and Huawei.[18] When looking at indicators such as the share of R&D activities and newly developed products in total production, patent registrations, and technology awards given by the government, SOEs have outperformed the private sector. Another factor compelling the SOEs to emphasize technology and innovation is that they pay their employees higher wages than the private sector.[19]

From the mid-2000s, the Chinese state began to set technical standards for telecommunication projects that favor domestic companies and exclude foreign ones. Collaboration between selected private companies and party and state organs intensified regarding finance, personnel, politics, etc. ZTE, a telecommunication company partially owned by the state but operated by private sector partners, became one of the most prominent companies during this period.[20] The Hu-Wen administration aimed to involve large private companies in programs such as the "Harmonious Society" and "Common Prosperity" to strengthen the political hegemony of the state. As a result of these policies, the composition of Chinese capital began to change, giving rise to a new bourgeois fraction that prioritizes innovation.[21]

However, the transformation of Chinese capital did not stop there. As the accumulation strategy based on low technology and cheap labor became increasingly ineffective, a part of the capitalist class turned to financial speculation. Although the government's stimulus packages after 2008 provided temporary relief, they also significantly increased the debt of local governments and SOEs, which led to the emergence of a large shadow banking sector. Furthermore, as the temporary economic recovery waned, profit margins in productive sectors declined, encouraging financial speculation. Private commercial banks, financial institutions, and real estate companies channeled substantial money into speculation by establishing nebulous partnerships. Introducing new financial products -like asset and wealth management products- made collecting large sums of money from the public possible, further fueling speculative tendencies.

Scandals that erupted during the Hu-Wen and Xi eras revealed that the financial speculator wing of the Chinese capital, in collaboration with the bureaucracy, established shell companies, concealed share structures, and manipulated state banks to defraud small investors looking to invest in the stock market. China

18 Ibid., pp. 571-572.
19 Hao Qi and David M. Kotz, "The Impact of State-Owned Enterprises on China's Economic Growth," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol: 52, no: 1, 2020, pp. 96-114.
20 Nogueira and Qi, p. 572; "ZTE (中兴通讯)," https://thechinaproject.com/company-profiles/zte/ (accessed November 26, 2022).
21 Nogueira and Qi, p. 571.

Minsheng Investment Group (CMIG), known as "China's J.P. Morgan," is a striking example of this tendency. A small group of individuals at the core of CMIG led their close associates to establish shell companies that bought CMIG shares. CMIG often awarded generous contracts and tenders to these shell companies through mechanisms that often did not comply with legal requirements. Taking advantage of their association with CMIG and the contracts they received, these shell companies borrowed significant amounts of money from state banks. CMIG also benefited from government credits and grants intended to promote industrial innovation through its hidden partners within the bureaucracy.[22]

Another notable case, Tomorrow Group, inflated its balance sheet and used the money it collected from banks and the stock market to purchase Ronglian, a company with a net asset value of only 14.8 million yuan, for a staggering 810 million yuan (54 times its net asset value!). It later appeared that Ronglian was a shell company that Tomorrow Group's executives established. It was also discovered that the Baoshang Bank, part of the same group, lent 15 billion yuan to over 200 shell companies. Furthermore, Anbang Insurance Group, one of China's largest insurance companies, established a massive pyramid scheme by collecting money from the stock market, investing it in hundreds of affiliated shell companies, and borrowing from the same companies. The illegal speculative activities of financial capital and the bureaucrats-turned-capitalists have threatened economic and political stability.[23]

In brief, before Xi took office, Chinese capital was already divided into three sectoral fractions: low-tech productive capital, high-tech productive capital, and financial speculators.[24] On the other hand, the degree of proximity in state-capital relations formed another axis of division parallel to this sectoral division but not entirely reducible to it. At the top of the hierarchy was a narrow bourgeois-bureaucrat group with significant influence over the SOEs and major private companies. In the middle tier lies another bourgeois-bureaucrat clique consisting of SOE managers and provincial party secretaries closely linked to major private companies. Private companies with limited ties to the state bureaucracy were at the lowest rung. It is worth mentioning that there are small bourgeoisie circles organized around the remnants of the bourgeois parties that cooperated with the CCP in the 1940s, such as the "United Front Democratic Parties" and "Patriotic Overseas Chinese Representatives." Since their position has largely remained symbolic since 1949, they do not significantly influence the party-state today. Additionally, influential figures such as top lawyers, media executives, academics, and leading figures of the cultural industry have intricate connections with various layers of the capitalist hierarchy.[25] These groups often organize themselves in clubs and associations outside the party and state hierarchy, attempting to exert influence over economic and political affairs. One notable example is the Taishan Industrial Research Institute (known as the "Taishan Club"), with roots dating back to the 1980s and

22 Meg Rithmire and Hao Chen, "The Emergence of Mafia-Like Business Systems in China," *The China Quarterly*, vol: 248, no: 1, 2021, pp. 1045-1046.
23 Ibid., pp. 1047-1055.
24 Nogueira and Qi, pp. 571-574.
25 "A State Adequate to the Task: Conversations with Lao Xie," *Chuang*, no: 2, 2019, pp. 324-326.

officially established in 1994, which plays a role in bringing together ultra-wealthy individuals.[26] Xi Jinping perceives these divisions, especially independent initiatives like the Taishan Club, as factors threatening political stability in China.

Corruption

The problem of corruption deepened in parallel with the political-economic context explained above. Corruption has long been one of the critical mechanisms enabling the metamorphosis of the party bureaucracy into a bourgeoisie. After the start of the "dual-price system" in 1984, bureaucrats at the Material Supply Bureau amassed great wealth by selling cheap, "in-plan" industrial materials to their bourgeois networks.[27] During the wave of privatizations in the late 1990s and early 2000s, many bureaucrats became shareholders and managers of privatized companies, looting approximately 5 trillion US dollars in wealth. Large bribes from private companies to the bureaucrats to secure government contracts and evade taxes have also contributed to the bourgeois transformation of the Chinese bureaucracy.

Another mechanism runs through family networks. Local and foreign private companies doing business and eager to maintain good relations with the government employ the family members and relatives of the bureaucrats and pay them generously. As we saw above, organic connections between financial speculators and the bureaucracy have also been formed. According to a 2006 study, out of 3,200 Chinese citizens with a wealth exceeding 15 million dollars, approximately 2,900 were family members and relatives of bureaucrats.[28]These developments have made corruption a structural problem in the country since the 1980s. The public has been dismayed by corrupt officials. However, as long as the economy developed rapidly and average incomes increased, these reactions did not reach a level that could threaten the regime.[29]

After the 2008 crisis, this situation started to change. With the economic pie not growing as fast as before, corruption became more apparent to the public.[30] Additionally, as different factions within the capital and the party struggled against each other, they also used corruption files as a weapon, posing a threat to political stability. The events leading up to the 18th Party Congress when Xi Jinping came to power highlighted this issue. One of Xi's main rivals, Bo Xilai, the party secretary of Chongqing, was arrested on corruption charges before the congress, and his wife, Gu Kailai, was charged with the murder of a British businessman with whom the Bo family cooperated in shady business matters. The media reported that Bo's

26 Ibid., p. 290; William Zheng, "Taishan Club For Country's Leading Tycoons Disbands," *South China Morning Post*, February 14, 2021; Yuan Guobao, "Taishan Club: The Rise and Fall of Secretive Roundtable of China's Richest," October 6, 2021, https://www.thinkchina.sg/taishan-club-rise-and-fall-secretive-roundtable-chinas-richest (accessed November 9, 2022).
27 Nogueira and Qi, p. 565.
28 Minqi Li, *China and the Twenty-First Century Crisis*, London: Pluto Press, 2016, pp. 19-23, 32-34.
29 Deng Yuwen, "Who Are Xi's Enemies?," October 15, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/15/xi-congress-enemies-communist-china/ (accessed October 23, 2022).
30 Ibid.

family fortune was at least 136 million USD.[31] However, two other news reports published during the same period showed that those involved in Bo's downfall were not much different from him. According to a *New York Times* report, Premier Wen Jiabao's family had a fortune of at least 2.7 billion USD.[32] According to a *Bloomberg News* report, Xi Jinping's family and relatives had a rich portfolio, including investments of a total of 376 million USD in different companies, an 18% stake in a mining company with a total worth of 1.73 billion USD, and 20 million dollars in bonds from a technology company.[33] Thus, Xi Jinping had to address the issue of corruption closely to avoid the weakening of party-state hegemony and weaken his rivals within the bureaucracy, primarily those closely linked to financial speculators, while protecting his inner circle.

Aggravating national questions

As Hu Jintao handed over his seat to Xi Jinping, he left behind a growing tangle of national issues, especially concerning the Uyghurs and Tibetans. The CCP challenged Han chauvinism in the 1930s by promising the Uyghurs, Tibetans, and other oppressed nationalities the right to self-determination. After coming to power, the PRC implemented specific positive discrimination measures and granted symbolic autonomy to these oppressed nationalities. Still, it never recognized their right to self-determination.[34] Language and religious freedom for these groups were frequently violated. Since the Mao era, a settler-colonial policy based on transferring the Han population to Xinjiang and Tibet was enforced. Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, which holds 22% of China's oil and 28% of its natural gas reserves,[35] experienced the most profound impact of this settler-colonialism. Through the military-cum-economic organization called Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, established in 1954, the policy of Han population transfer has been systematically implemented to this day. As a result, the demographic structure of Xinjiang underwent a dramatic change. The Uyghurs' proportion of the regional population declined from 82.7% in 1945 to 45.7% in 1982 and 44.8% in 2020. In contrast, the Han population, which was only 6.2% in 1945, increased to 40.3% in 1982 and reached 42% in 2020.[36]

31 Susan Berfield, "The Business Ties of Bo Xilai," April 27, 2012, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-04-26/the-business-ties-of-bo-xilai (accessed October 27, 2012).
32 David Barboza, "Billions in Hidden Riches for Family of Chinese Leader," October 25, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/26/business/global/family-of-wen-jiabao-holds-a-hidden-fortune-in-china.html (accessed October 27, 2012).
33 "Xi Jinping Millionaire Relations Reveal Elite Chinese Fortunes," June 29, 2012, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-06-29/xi-jinping-millionaire-relations-reveal-fortunes-of-elite?sref=1FkogH50 (accessed October 27, 2012).
34 Burak Gürel, "Stalinizm ile Kapitalizm Arasında Köprü Kuran Bir Düşünür: Domenico Losurdo," *Devrimci Marksizm*, no: 45/46, 2021, pp. 231-232.
35 Ji Yeon Hong and Wenhui Yang, "Oilfields, Mosques and Violence: Is There a Resource Curse in Xinjiang?," *British Journal of Political Science*, vol: 50, no: 1, 2020, p. 54.
36 Anthony Howell and C. Cindy Fan, "Migration and Inequality in Xinjiang: A Survey of Han and Uyghur Migrants in Urumqi," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol: 52, no: 1, 2011, p. 123; "Xinjiang's Han Chinese Growing Faster than Uyghurs," June 15, 2021, https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Xinjiang%E2%80%99s-Han-Chinese-growing-faster-than-Uyghurs-53420.html (ac-

After the "Great Western Development Strategy" was launched in 2000, mining and infrastructure investments in the region surged while the economic disparity between the Uyghurs and Han populations widened. The state suppressed mass demonstrations carried out by the Uyghurs against language and religious freedom violations and Han population transfer, such as the student protests from December 1985 to 1988.[37] The Han-Uyghur clashes in Urumqi in July 2009, resulting in the deaths of 197 people and injuries to over 1,700 people, marked the breaking point of accumulated tension.[38]

The bomb attack organized by Uyghur Islamists in Tiananmen Square (October 28, 2013)

Over time, despite a significant portion of the Uyghur population having secular tendencies, the Uyghur national movement shifted towards religious and conservative channels due to the association of communism with Han chauvinism and the suppression of religious practices. Various Islamist groups, ranging from Al-Qaeda to ISIS, gained supporters among the Uyghurs. These groups' most notable actions occurred during the first two years of Xi Jinping's tenure.

On April 24, 2013, 21 people were killed in clashes between armed Uyghurs and the police in Maralbeshi county of Kashgar.[39] On October 28, 2013, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (also known as the "Turkistan Islamic Party") carried out a bombing attack in Tiananmen Square, located close to the central organs of the party-state, resulting in the deaths of 5 people and injuring 38 others.[40] On March

cessed October 31, 2022).

37 Brian Spivey, "The December 12th Student Movement: Uyghur Student Protest in Reform-Era China," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 2022, pp. 1-20, doi:10.1017/S0021911822001206.

38 "Xinjiang Arrests 'Now Over 1,500'," August 3, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8181563.stm (accessed October 31, 2022).

39 "China Jails 11 in Xinjiang for Religious Hatred," June 20, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22982398 (accessed October 31, 2022).

40 "China to Try Eight People Over Deadly Tiananmen Attack," May 31, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-27647842 (accessed October 31, 2022).

1, 2014, a knife attack at a train station in Kunming resulted in 31 people being killed and over 140 others injured.[41] On July 28, 2014, clashes in Yarkand County, Kashgar and involving a combination of mass protests and armed strikes, led to the deaths of nearly 100 people according to official figures, but independent sources suggest the death toll could be in the hundreds.[42]

Xi's ten-year record

Anti-labor policies

Xi's ten-year record has been marked by attempts to find solutions to the challenges discussed above. To mitigate the Third Great Depression's adverse effects on Chinese capitalism, more specifically, to restore the profitability of Chinese capital, the government has carried out an enormous assault against the working class from 2015 on. Labor NGOs and solidarity networks suffered from more repressive measures than in previous administrations.[43] One critical turning point during this period was the eruption of a strike in a factory owned by Jasic Technology in Huizhou city in Guangdong province in 2018. Leftist students, including many Maoists, from various universities, notably Peking University, who actively supported this strike were arrested.[44] As a result of the government crackdown, the labor movement began to decline.[45]

41 "Four Sentenced in China Over Kunming Station Attack," September 12, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-29170238 (accessed October 31, 2022).

42 "China Now Says Almost 100 Were Killed in Xinjiang Violence," August 4, 2014, https://time.com/3078381/china-xinjiang-violence-shache-yarkand/ (accessed October 31, 2022).

43 Yaxue Cao, "Chinese Authorities Orchestrate Surprise Raid of Labor NGOs in Guangdong, Arresting Leaders," December 10, 2015, https://chinachange.org/2015/12/10/chinese-authorities-orchestrate-surprise-raid-of-labor-ngos-in-guangdong-arresting-leaders/ (accessed October 31, 2022); Keegan Elmer, "Five Activists Held in Crackdown," *South China Morning Post*, January 23, 2019; Jude Howell, "From Green Shoots to Crushed Petals: Labour NGOs in China," *Made in China Journal*, vol: 6, no: 1, 2021, pp. 102-107.

44 Mimi Lau, "Hard-core Maoists Fight with Students for Workers' Rights," *South China Morning Post*, August 11, 2018; Shen Mo, "China: Arrests of Maoist Youth Triggers Online Protests," February 10, 2018, https://chinaworker.info/en/2018/02/10/16980/ (accessed November 9, 2022); Christian Shepherd and Ben Blanchard, "Leading Chinese Marxist Student Taken Away by Police on Mao's Birthday," December 26, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-politics-mao-idUSKCN1OP0EK (accessed November 9, 2022). Other Maoist groups also suffered from state repression ("Chinese Police Detain Maoist Leftists Ahead of Ruling Party Centenary," June 9, 2021, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/maoists-detentions-06092021114100.html (accessed November 9, 2022); Guo Rui and William Zheng, "Mao Fanatics Get Prison Terms for Tainting Leaders," *South China Morning Post*, January 12, 2022.

45 This interview with Chinese Marxist economist Ying Chen provides a clear framework for the rise and fall of the labor movement: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdeSCw5a5_U (accessed November 9, 2022).

Students who were arrested because of their solidarity with the labor strike at Jasic Technology (2018)

During the Hu-Wen era, Chinese workers gained substantial material concessions, including wage raises and expanding social security coverage. However, shortly after Xi took office, some officials claimed that the previous administration made unrealistic promises about social security and brought up the issue of raising the retirement age.[46] In China, the retirement age in the public sector is 60 for men, 55 for white-collar women, and 50 for blue-collar women. This rule has remained unchanged since the Mao era. The 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015), prepared during the Hu-Wen era, suggested flexibility in the retirement age. However, the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), bearing Xi's signature, reveals the government's intention to raise the retirement age gradually. The working class is known to be opposed to this plan. So far, the Xi administration has not taken concrete steps toward this goal.[47]

Despite Xi's rhetoric of "common prosperity" and the "Chinese dream," social inequalities have not decreased. The Gini coefficient, which measures the combination of class and regional disparities, reached a considerably high level of 0.47 in 2012. During Xi's tenure, this coefficient did not decrease and was still calculated as 0.47 in 2020.[48] Moreover, the share of personal wealth of Chinese billionaires in the total national income increased from 7% in 2019 to 15% in 2021.[49]

46 "A State Adequate to the Task," pp. 332-33.
47 Iori Kawate, "China's Young and Old Rail Against Raising Retirement Age," August 4, 2021, https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Society/China-s-young-and-old-rail-against-raising-retirement-age (accessed November 9, 2022); "How Should China Raise Retirement Age?," March 16, 2021, https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202103/16/WS604fe77ea31024ad0baaf54c_2.html (accessed November 9, 2022).
48 Tom Hancock, "China Needs Cut to Inequality for Common Prosperity: PBOC's Cai," November 29, 2021, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-29/china-needs-cut-to-inequality-for-common-prosperity-pboc-s-cai (accessed April 7, 2022).
49 Michael Roberts, "China: Xi's Third Term – Part Two: Property, Debt and Common Prosperity," October 18, 2022, https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2022/10/18/china-xis-third-term-part-two-property-debt-and-common-prosperity/ (accessed October 18, 2022).

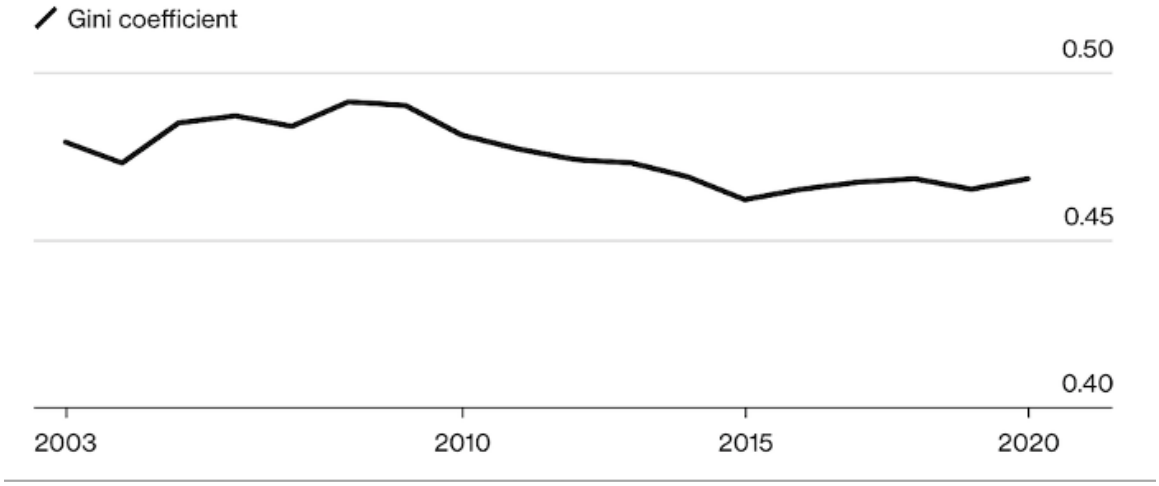

Figure 4. Gini coefficient in China (2003-2020)[50]

Gendered policies

The Xi administration ended the one-child policy, which had existed since 1979. The right to have two children was granted to married couples in 2016, and the right to have three children was given in 2021.[51] Women's high participation level in education and the workforce has been one of the most significant historical achievements of the Chinese Revolution. Despite the problems it created, the one-child policy also strengthened women's gains. Giving couples the freedom to choose the number of children they want is not the main issue. The Xi administration implemented this change as part of a male-dominated campaign imposing the motherhood role on women.[52] So far, this campaign has not yielded visible results, as the fertility rate has not increased. If the current trend continues, China's population, currently at 1.4 billion, is expected to fall below 800 million by 2100.[53]

50 Hancock, "China Needs".
51 "China Allows Three Children in Major Policy Shift," May 31, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57303592 (accessed November 1, 2022).
52 Zixu Wang, Xin Chen,and Caroline Radnofsky, "China Proposes Teaching Masculinity to Boys as State is Alarmed by Changing Gender Roles," March 5, 2021, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-proposes-teaching-masculinity-boys-state-alarmed-changing-gender-roles-n1258939 (accessed October 5, 2022); Zhuoran Li and Jennifer Lee, "Chinese Feminists Caught Between a Rock and the Party," July 15, 2022, https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/chinese-feminists-caught-between-a-rock-and-the-party/ (October 5, 2022).
53 Eleanor Olcott, "China's Demographic Crisis Looms Over Xi Jinping's Third Term," October 3, 2022, https://on.ft.com/3RtPgI6 (accessed November 1, 2022).

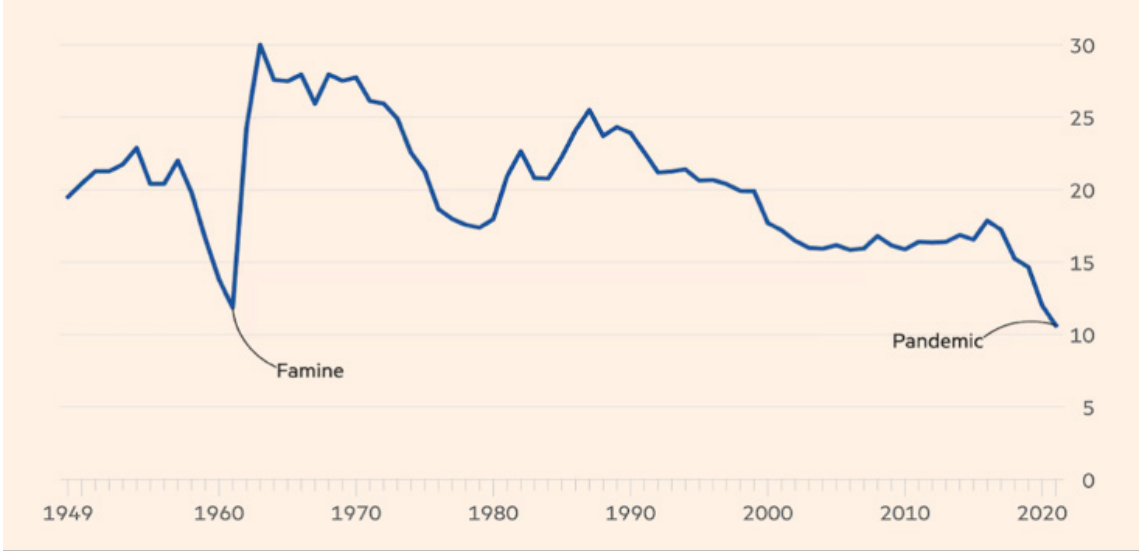

Figure 5. Number of births in China, 1949-2021 (Million)[54]

The Chinese government put heavy pressure on women and the LGBTQ+ movements, which Xi perceived as obstacles to his gendered policies. On March 6, 2015, five feminists preparing to distribute leaflets against sexual harassment of women on public transportation in Beijing on International Women's Day (March 8) were arrested and detained for a staggering 37 days.[55] Other actions addressing the issue of sexual harassment were persistently obstructed.

The case of renowned female tennis player Peng Shuai added to the concerns about Xi's approach. On November 2, 2021, Peng Shuai posted a message on the social media platform Weibo, revealing that Zhang Gaoli (a former CCP Politburo Standing Committee member and former Deputy Prime Minister from 2013 to 2018) sexually assaulted her. However, internet censors quickly removed the message, and media coverage of the incident was not allowed. Peng disappeared from the public eye for nearly two weeks, most likely facing threats and intimidation, and was unable to bring up the matter again publicly.[56]

In summary, Xi pursued policies hostile not only towards the working class but also towards women. His actions demonstrated an apparent disregard for women's rights and freedom of expression, and the suppression of gender-related issues under his leadership was evident.

The quest for a repressive "solution" to national questions

Xi tried to address the aggravating national questions by employing state violence

54 Ibid.
55 Wang Zheng, "Detention of the Feminist Five in China," *Feminist Studies*, vol: 41, no: 2, 2015, pp. 476-482.
56 Kai Wang and Wanyuan Song, "Peng Shuai: How China Censored a Tennis Star," February 1, 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/59338205 (accessed November 9, 2022).

to an unprecedented level. In Xinjiang, thousands of Uyghurs were detained in the so-called "vocational education centers" ("re-education camps") between 2014 and 2019. Enforced disappearances, travel restrictions, and digital surveillance became a part of daily life.[57] The number of staff of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, responsible for Han population transfer, reached 3.25 million in 2019. Approximately one-third of the 1.25 million increase in Xinjiang's population between 2016 and 2019 can be attributed to this organization's personnel growth.[58] Prominent Uyghur intellectual Ilham Tohti was sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of separatism in 2014.[59] The deepening of Han chauvinism and settler-colonialism poisoned Han-Uyghur relations while expanding the influence of religious-extremist movements on the Uyghur community.

Hong Kong also witnessed significant repression under Xi's leadership. After Britain handed over Hong Kong to the PRC in 1997, it operated under the "one country, two systems" framework as a "Special Administrative Region." Hong Kong's capitalist class maintained a close relationship with Western capital and states, especially the US and the UK. Additionally, due to the continuation of free elections, organizing rights, and the right to assembly and protest, Hong Kong continued to be a region where dissent against the Chinese regime (from left to right) could be organized. The Chinese state started undermining Hong Kong's autonomy by supporting the formation of a pro-mainland capitalist faction and gradually curtailing existing freedoms. Xi took the most decisive and firm step in this direction. In 2014, the Chinese state required approval from the Chinese government for candidates participating in Hong Kong elections. In response, the "Umbrella Movement" carried out mass protests on Hong Kong streets for three months, with more than one million participants on the 7.5 million-populated island.[60] The Chinese state did not yield to the protests, thereby eliminating the most fundamental democratic right in Hong Kong. Subsequently, the repression against CCP critics intensified.

The second move to eliminate Hong Kong's autonomy occurred in 2019 when a proposed law allowed the Hong Kong government to extradite individuals to mainland China. In response, protests with over two million participants were held in 2019 and 2020, resulting in violent clashes between police and demonstrators.[61]

57 Some sources suggest that around 1 million Uyghurs (that is, about 10% of the Uyghur population in the region) were held in the camps (Darren Byler, "Ghost World," May 1, 2019, https://logicmag.io/china/ghost-world/ (accessed January 12, 2021). The report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the subject stated that many people were kept in camps but did not provide an exact number (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "OHCHR Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China," August 31, 2022, p. 18, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/2022-08-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf (accessed November 26, 2022).

58 Sidney Leng and Cissy Zhou, "Region's Population Jumps 18pc from Decade Ago," *South China Morning Post*, May 13, 2021.

59 "China Jails Prominent Uighur Academic Ilham Tohti for Life," September 23, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-29321701 (accessed April 7, 2022).

60 "Hong Kong Çin Toprağıdır!," June 28, 2022, https://gercekgazetesi1.net/uluslararasi/hong-kong-cin-topragidir (accessed November 9, 2022).

61 "Hong Kong: Tek Ülke, Tek Sistem, İki Rejim," August 27, 2019, https://gercekgazetesi1.net/

In September 2019, the Hong Kong administration agreed to amend parts of the law.[62] Shortly after, in November, Xi, disturbed by the success of pro-autonomy candidates in the local elections and taking advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic-related lockdowns, launched a final assault. In May 2020, the National Security Law was enacted, effectively ending the region's autonomy. The Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions dissolved under intense state pressure on October 3, 2021. Censorship was imposed on the press, numerous pro-autonomy politicians and activists were arrested, and tens of thousands fled Hong Kong.[63]

Mass protests in Hong Kong (2019)

Other parts of Chinese society also suffered from increasing repression under Xi's rule. For instance, on July 9, 2015, more than 300 human rights lawyers were detained; some later released were put under house arrest.[64] Academic freedoms, which were already fragile, were further restricted. Publications by academics faced strict scrutiny, and the strengthened surveillance system monitored the views expressed by students during classes, leading to punishment for those expressing dissenting opinions.[65]

uluslararasi/hong-kong-tek-ulke-tek-sistem-iki-rejim (accessed November 9, 2022).

62 "The Evolution of the Hong Kong Protests," November 22, 2021, https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2019/11/22/hong-kong-china-protests-timeline-lon-orig-bks.cnn (accessed November 9, 2022).

63 Austin Ramzy, "As Hong Kong's Civil Society Buckles, One Group Tries to Hold On," October 24, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/24/world/asia/hong-kong-civil-society.html (accessed November 9, 2022); Vivian Wang, "'This Drop Came So Quickly': Shrinking Schools Add to Hong Kong Exodus," October 11, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/11/world/asia/hong-kong-population-drop.html (accessed November 9, 2022).

64 Stella Chen, "Lawyer Jailed in '709' Crackdown Freed," *South China Morning Post*, September 27, 2022.

65 "Orwell in the Chinese Classroom," May 27, 2019, https://madeinchinajournal.com/2019/05/27/orwell-in-the-chinese-classroom/ (accessed October 7, 2022).

To complete our analysis, we can compare the domestic security budget with the national defense budget. The domestic security budget surpassed the national defense budget for the first time in 2010 (during the second half of the Hu-Wen era). The ratio of the domestic security budget to the national defense budget was 105.1% in 2013 (the first year of Xi's tenure) and increased to 113% in 2016.[66] In other words, even during an increased military encirclement led by the US, the Chinese state allocates more resources to internal security than the military. In other words, the Chinese state views labor, women, and national movements as primary threats.

Widespread purges within the bourgeoisie, party, and the state

While crushing the proletariat's most class-conscious and combative sections, Xi also tries to convey a clean and honest public image. To establish a class-neutral position in the eyes of society, he launched extensive anti-corruption campaigns within the party and state. Some major companies were penalized, with some bosses imprisoned. These measures aim to avoid the party-state's hegemonic decline, discipline the bureaucracy and bourgeoisie, and tie them closer to the party. We must recall that Xi started by cleaning up his own house before holding others accountable. It was no secret that his family, like other high-ranking bureaucrats, became wealthy due to capitalist restoration. Hence, as a starter, he had them withdraw from business activities, selling their company shares and dissolving their partnerships.[67]

Strikingly enough, during the past decade, around 100,000 lower and mid-level and a few hundred top-level officials were arrested under corruption investigations. Many of these operations targeted Xi's rivals within the party. In 2016, Xi claimed that certain people were organizing "political plot activities" to divide and destroy the party. In 2017, Vice President Wang Qishan claimed that some senior officials were trying to "seize party and state power."[68] The anti-corruption campaign played a significant role in Xi's internal power struggles. The first target was the Bo Xilai clique, which put obstacles to Xi Jinping's ascent to power on the eve of the 18th Party Congress in November 2012. As mentioned above, Bo was arrested on corruption charges and his wife's involvement in a murder case.[69]Another prominent figure, Zhou Yongkang, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee between 2002-2007 and the Minister of Public Security, was investigated for corruption and

66 Adrian Zenz, "China's Domestic Security Spending: An Analysis of Available Data," *China Brief*, vol: 18, no: 4, March 12, 2018, p. 6.
67 Michael Forsythe, "As China's Leader Fights Graft, His Relatives Shed Assets," June 17, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/18/world/asia/chinas-president-xi-jinping-investments.html (accessed August 16, 2016).
68 Klaus Heinrich Raditio, "Opinion – Factors Giving Rise to Xi Coup Rumours in China," October 11, 2022, https://www.e-ir.info/2022/10/11/opinion-factors-giving-rise-to-xi-coup-rumours-in-china/ (accessed November 1, 2022).
69 For a detailed analysis of the Bo Xilai affair, see Ahmet Devrim, "The Tremor in the Communist Party of China," November 8, 2012, https://socialistproject.ca/2012/11/b725/ (accessed November 12, 2022).

sentenced to life in prison. His family's assets of 14 billion USD were seized.[70] The Zhou case, in which the tradition of not arresting serving or retired Politburo Standing Committee members was first violated, is one of the top-level purges in the CCP's history.[71]

Underestimating Xi's ambitions, Hu Jintao's "Communist Youth League" faction and Jiang Zemin's Shanghai clique cooperated with Xi in Bo Xilai's purge. However, they soon realized Xi posed as much danger to them as Bo did. As mentioned above, a *NYT* report revealed that former Premier Wen Jiabao's family accumulated $2.7 billion. Duan Weihong, who assisted the Wen family in financial matters, was arrested in 2017. Wen pledged loyalty to Xi in exchange for the investigation not deepening.[72]

Xi did not stop at just suppressing his rivals but also aimed to homogenize the party further. In previous CCP administrations, there was a degree of tolerance for local experiments as long as they did not openly oppose or try to take over party leadership. For instance, Deng Xiaoping allowed alternative experiments like the Nanjie Village in Henan province, where agricultural production remained collectivized despite the nationwide decollectivization campaign. It is important to note that Deng's tolerance for Nanjie had more to do with controlling factional conflicts within the party than promoting democracy, especially considering his role in the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Allowing such local initiatives created a space for different factions within the party. However, under Xi's leadership, this approach has been abandoned. The emphasis has shifted from the differences in these experiments to their conformity with "Xi Jinping Thought." This uniformity could hinder the controlled maintenance of diversity within the party and become a source of instability, contrary to Xi's intentions.[73]

In addition to corruption investigations, Xi attempted to exert strict control over large corporations through heavy regulations and record-high fines. As explained earlier, Xi does not intend to change capitalist production relations or reverse capitalist restoration. Instead, he aims to strengthen China's state capitalism. Given the global trend of declining neoliberalism and rising state intervention in the economy, especially after 2008, Xi's push for a more robust state intervention appears understandable. It is becoming routine for many states, including imperialist states, to intervene extensively in the economy to recover from economic crises. Given this broader context, increasing state intervention in the Chinese economy seems unsurprising.

During Xi's tenure, while the state intensified its economic intervention, efforts were made to weaken the financial speculator side of capital and strengthen the faction focusing on technological innovation. For example, Guo Guangchang, CEO

70 Benjamin Kang Lim and Ben Blanchard, "Exclusive: China Ex-security Chief Warned Bo Xilai He Would Be Ousted –Sources," April 15, 2015, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-corruption-zhou-exclusive-idUSKBN0N610C20150415 (accessed August 16, 2016).
71 Olivia Cheung, "Factional Model-making in China: Party Elites' Open Political Contention in the Policy Process," *The China Quarterly*, vol: 251, 2022, p. 722.
72 Deng, "Who Are Xi's Enemies?".
73 Cheung, "Factional Model-making".

of Fosun International Limited, known as "China's Warren Buffett," was detained several times in 2015. In June 2017, the China Banking Regulatory Commission declared HNA, Fosun International Limited, Dalian Wanda Group, and Anbang Insurance Group (discussed earlier) as "systemic risks." It started an investigation into their overseas investments. In February 2018, Anbang was nationalized, and its CEO, Wu Xiaohui, was arrested.[74]

Such investigations extended to China's technology companies and digital platforms. The regulation of such firms and the sanctions imposed on them have recently become a significant part of capitalist states' increasing economic intervention, including in the United States, European countries, Australia, Brazil, and India.[75] The Chinese state followed suit, but what sets Xi's approach apart is the intertwining of these penalties with political interference and pressures. Xi cannot tolerate capitalists advocating loosening state capitalism and –even worse– those who (indirectly) question the CCP's monopoly on power. By combining financial penalties with police repression, he sends a clear message to the bourgeoisie: "Toe the line." The most famous CCP member of the bourgeoisie, Jack Ma, the owner of Alibaba, Alipay, and the Ant Group, dramatically faced this. After his comments in October 2020 about state banks being too risk-averse and stifling innovation, Ma disappeared for three months, sparking rumors of house arrest. The $34 billion IPO of Ant Group on the Shanghai and Hong Kong stock exchanges was canceled at the last minute. In April 2021, Alibaba was fined $2.8 billion for monopolistic practices, causing significant losses in Ant Group's shares. Ultimately, Ma's influence was curtailed.[76]

Other companies faced similar actions. In July 2022, Didi, an online transportation

74 Rithmire and Chen, p. 1049.

75 Federal Trade Commission, "FTC Imposes $5 Billion Penalty and Sweeping New Privacy Restrictions on Facebook," July 24, 2019, https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2019/07/ftc-imposes-5-billion-penalty-sweeping-new-privacy-restrictions-facebook (accessed September 27, 2022); Foo Yun Chee, "Google Loses Challenge Against EU Antitrust Decision, Other Probes Loom," September 14, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/technology/eu-courts-wed-ruling-record-44-bln-google-fine-may-set-precedent-2022-09-14/ (accessed September 27, 2022); Sankalp Phartiyal, "Google Fined $113 Million in Second India Antitrust Penalty," October 25, 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-10-25/india-antitrust-body-fines-google-113-million-over-app-store (accessed November 10, 2022); "Brazil Court Fines Apple, Orders to Sell iPhone With Charger," October 13, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/legal/brazil-court-fines-apple-orders-sell-iphone-with-charger-2022-10-13/ (accessed November 10, 2022); Aoife White, "Apple Prefers Fine to Obeying Antitrust Order, Vestager Says," February 23, 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-23/apple-prefers-fines-to-obeying-antitrust-order-vestager-says (accessed November 10, 2022); Josh Taylor, "Uber Faces $26m Fine in Australia Over Misleading Cancellation Warnings and Taxi Fare Estimates," April 26, 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/26/uber-faces-26m-fine-in-australia-over-misleading-cancellation-fee-charges-and-taxi-fare-estimates (accessed November 10, 2022).

76 Shuli Ren, "Jack Ma's Blunt Words Just Cost Him $35 Billion," November 3, 2020, https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-11-03/jack-ma-s-blunt-china-bank-talk-cost-ant-its-35-billion-ipo (accessed November 7, 2022); Sam Peach, "Why Did Alibaba's Jack Ma Disappear for Three Months?," March 20, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-56448688 (accessed November 7, 2022); Zheping Huang, "Alibaba's First Sales Miss in Two Years Shows Crackdown Toll," August 3, 2021, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-08-03/alibaba-sales-miss-in-sign-spending-has-yet-to-pay-off (accessed November 7, 2022).

platform often referred to as "China's Uber," was fined $1.19 billion for violating data security.[77] Several online education companies partly listed on American stock exchanges faced heavy fines in 2021 for false advertising. In January 2013, a campaign initiated by a charity organization against food waste in Beijing quickly turned into a national campaign called "Clean Plate" under Xi's leadership. A law against food waste was passed in April 2021. During the campaign, bureaucrats who feasted in luxury restaurants were targeted, and social media influencers who wasted enormous amounts of food in videos were reprimanded.[78] With all these measures, Xi attempted to portray himself as a leader fighting against illegitimate gains and greediness, striving for equal educational opportunities and caring for the ordinary people.

There were also purges with more explicit political motivations. For example, the Taishan Club, comprised of ultra-rich individuals mentioned earlier, was forced to disband in 2021.[79] In China, the children of old-generation party-state leaders who can rise to high positions are often called "princelings." Some of these princelings not only advocate for a more liberal line economically but also criticize the CCP sometimes. Some of them fell out of favor with Xi. Ren Zhiqiang, known as "China's Donald Trump" and a real estate mogul, was among the most famous. Xi began dealing with Ren as soon as he came to power. When CCTV, the state television that had never reported on Wen Jiabao's enormous wealth, announced that Huayuan real estate company, owned by Ren, owed significant taxes to the state, Ren called CCTV "the dumbest pig on earth." Ren was popular among the public, especially the middle class, for his frankness. He had 37 million followers on the social media platform Weibo. However, when Ren criticized Xi for turning "the people's state" into "the party's state," his Weibo account was shut down. Ren was sentenced to 18 years in prison on charges of disinformation.[80] Another prominent representative of the prince generation (or "princess" in her case), Cai Xiang, a professor at the Central Party School's Party Building Center, initially defended Ren Zhiqiang, attracting attention. Later, when she called Xi a "mafia boss" in a leaked phone conversation, she was expelled from the party and currently lives in exile in the United States.[81]

77 Evelyn Cheng, "China Fines Didi More Than $1 Billion for Breaking Data Security Laws," July 21, 2021, https://www.cnbc.com/2022/07/21/china-fines-didi-more-than-1-billion-for-breaking-data-security-laws.html (accessed November 7, 2022).

78 Bella Huang and Amy Qin, "Xi Declares War on Food Waste, and China Races to Tighten Its Belt," August 21, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/21/world/asia/china-food-waste-xi.html (accessed November 4, 2022).

79 Zheng, "Taishan Club"; Yuan, "Taishan Club."

80 Amy Li, "Property tycoon Ren Zhiqiang slams CCTV as 'the dumbest pig on earth'," January 3, 2014, https://www.scmp.com/news/china-insider/article/1396501/property-tycoon-ren-zhiqiang-slams-cctv-dumbest-pig-earth (accessed November 9, 2022); Chris Buckley, "China's 'Big Cannon' Blasted Xi. Now He's Been Jailed for 18 Years," September 22, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/22/world/asia/china-ren-zhiqiang-tycoon.html (accessed November 9, 2022).

81 Jeremy Goldkorn, "Retired Professor Who Called Xi Jinping 'Mafia Boss' Expelled from Party," August 18, 2020, https://thechinaproject.com/2020/08/18/retired-professor-who-called-xi-jinping-mafia-boss-expelled-from-party/ (accessed November 9, 2022).

The magnificent success and tragic failure of China's pandemic response

When considering the Xi era, one cannot ignore the COVID-19 pandemic. What was and was not done in the fight against the pandemic revealed the perspective, power, and weaknesses of the Xi administration. In December 2019, when news of the outbreak started coming from Wuhan city of Hubei province in central China, the CCP's initial response was to detain those spreading the word, censor social media, and deny the epidemic. Official media claimed that the outbreak rumors were false and aimed to incite panic among the public.[82] When the crisis could no longer be ignored, the Chinese government approached the matter seriously. Measures such as restricting entry to and exit from the country, implementing lockdowns, conducting frequent tests on the entire population, and isolating positive cases until they tested negative were immediately put into practice. A successful 76-day lockdown in Wuhan, a city with a population of over 10 million, marked the end of the first wave of the pandemic. During this initial phase, state institutions succeeded in mobilizing the public in the fight against the pandemic.[83]

Furthermore, from the beginning of 2020, the Chinese government began sharing information it gathered about COVID-19 with the world and started issuing warnings, including the immediate implementation of measures such as mask usage. With the confidence gained from the successful Wuhan lockdown, the state adopted lockdown as a fundamental strategy in the fight against the pandemic. This strategy, known as the "Zero-COVID" policy, became one of the key motifs of Xi's attempt to create an image as a leader above classes and a tool to bring capitalists and bureaucrats in line. This approach conveyed that the party-state under Xi's leadership prioritized human life over capitalist profits. The uncompromising implementation of the "Zero-COVID" policy was defined as one of the fundamental criteria for loyalty to the party and the state. Officials suspected of deviating from this line were punished.[84]

While the world experienced humanitarian and economic devastation in 2020 due to the pandemic, China became the most successful country in fighting it thanks to its "Zero-COVID" policy.[85] The rest of the country was relatively unaffected by the pandemic thanks to the Wuhan quarantine. While the world's average per capita income decreased by 4.3% in 2020, it increased by 2% in China. In 2021, the world

82 On January 1, 2020, the Chinese state mouthpiece *Global Times* announced that eight people were arrested for spreading rumors of an epidemic in Wuhan ("Seafood Market Closed After Outbreak of 'Unidentified' Pneumonia," January 1, 2020, https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1175369.shtml (accessed December 30, 2021)). On January 29, 2020, *Global Times* wrote that those eight people are commendable for alerting the public ("Eight Wuhan Residents Praised for 'Whistle-blowing' Virus Outbreak," January 29, 2020, https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1177960.shtml (accessed December 30, 2021).

83 Yan Hairong, "Mode Switching: The State, Market, and Anti-Covid-19 Shadow of Socialism in China," *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol: 44, 2020, pp. 213-221.

84 William Zheng, "Beijing Punishes Dozens of Officials Over Latest Wave," *South China Morning Post*, March 22, 2022.

85 On China's early success in pandemic control, see Ertuğrul Oruç, "Humanity Faces the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Revolutionary Marxism 2021*, pp. 137-139.

average rose by 4.8%, and China's by 8%.[86] In short, China's economic performance diverged positively from the rest of the world in the first two years of the pandemic. Chinese companies also successfully produced large quantities of masks, test kits, and inactivated vaccines. Approximately 90% of the population was vaccinated.[87] The Chinese government also turned the pandemic into a diplomatic opportunity by donating vaccines and masks to poor countries.[88]

However, since the end of 2021, the limits of this policy began to emerge. The perception that mRNA vaccines developed by Western companies like Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech were much more successful in providing immunity compared to the inactivated vaccines developed by Chinese companies like Sinovac and Sinopharm became widespread.[89] In March 2020, an agreement was made between China's Fosun Pharma and the American company Pfizer to import the Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA vaccine into China. However, the Xi administration did not approve this agreement.[90] Instead, an economic nationalist, import-substitution policy was adopted, envisioning the production of mRNA vaccines by China's domestic companies. On one hand, through official media channels, the fallacy that China's inactivated vaccines were more effective than the Western mRNA vaccines was spread,[91] and on the other hand, Chinese companies were tasked with developing mRNA vaccines.[92] At least eight Chinese companies attempted to develop mRNA vaccines.[93] However, these efforts failed to provide mRNA vaccines to the Chinese

86https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD.ZG?end=2021&locations=CN-1W&start=2019 (accessed November 11, 2022).

87 "Lockdown Pain Fails to Break Elderly Vaccine Resistance in China," July 5, 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-07-04/lockdown-pain-fails-to-break-elderly-vaccine-resistance-in-china (accessed November 11, 2022).

88 Moritz Rudolf, "China's Health Diplomacy during Covid-19: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Action," January 26, 2021, https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/chinas-health-diplomacy-during-covid-19 (accessed March 7, 2021).

89 According to a study conducted in Hong Kong and published in *The Lancet*, two doses of inactivated CoronaVac vaccine are ineffective in creating immunity compared to two doses of the Pfizer-Biontech mRNA vaccine. However, when both vaccines are administered in three doses, the difference in effect between them closes. It is impossible to predict whether the findings of this study will be questioned by other studies in the future. However, even if we accept this study as correct, the result does not change. The pre-peer reviewed version of the research was published on March 22, 2022. The peer-reviewed version was published on July 15, 2022 (Marchina E McMenamin, Joshua Nealon, Yun Lin, Jessica Y Wong, Justin K Cheung, Eric H Y Lau, Peng Wu, Gabriel M. Leung, Benjamin J Cowling, "Vaccine Effectiveness of One, Two, and Three Doses of BNT162b2 and CoronaVac Against COVID-19 in Hong Kong: A Population-based Observational Study, *Lancet Infectious Diseases*, vol: 22, no: 9, 2022, pp. 1435-1443). The Chinese state accepted the necessity of the mRNA vaccines in 2020 and supported domestic companies' projects in this direction. Lengthy and large-scale quarantines were also adopted in the same context. Thus, the findings of the abovementioned study do not change the picture we draw here.

90 Yvaine Ye, "China's First mRNA Vaccine Is Close— Will That Solve Its COVID Woes?," June 27, 2022, https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-01690-3 (accessed November 1, 2022).

91 "Chinese Media Criticise Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine, Tout Local Shots," January 20, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-vaccine-china-idUSKBN29P1HT (accessed November 1, 2022).

92 Eleanor Olcott, "China Rushes to Develop mRNA Vaccine As Doubts Grow Over Local Jabs," January 6, 2022, https://on.ft.com/3EYJOGI (accessed November 1, 2022).

93 Hu Yuwei, "Can SinoBIO's COVID-19 mRNA Vaccine Receives Approval for Clinical Trial Application in China," April 4, 2022, https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202204/1257491.shtml (ac-

people on time. While Western mRNA vaccines were administered globally in 2021, China lacked mRNA vaccines. Additionally, the Moderna company rejected China's request for information and technology sharing regarding mRNA vaccines.[94] Chinese authorities approved the first domestically developed mRNA COVID vaccine (developed by the CSPC Pharmaceutical Group Ltd.) in March 2023, long after the end of the pandemic.[95]

The dependence of the Chinese people on inactivated vaccines, which are thought to have a lower efficacy level, forced the government to implement extended lockdowns with each new outbreak. This situation began to squeeze the country economically in 2022. Shanghai, one of China's most prominent metropolises, went through a lengthy lockdown in April and May 2022.[96] Long-term lockdowns were also experienced in other cities. This state of deadlock extensively tested the patience of the public. In short, Xi's inflexible vaccine nationalism collided with the reality that China is still far behind the West in science and technology, leading to its failure. This failure demonstrates the immense difficulty of China, a semi-peripheral country, to become an imperialist power. We will return to this topic at the end of this article when analyzing the November 2022 wave of social unrest.

The Belt and Road Initiative, Made in China 2025 and the imperialist backlash

After analyzing the domestic contradictions, we can finally move on to the antagonisms on the international plane. As I noted previously, the contradictions between the imperialist camp and China's semi-peripheral capitalism have intensified since the beginning of the Third Great Depression. Two strategies bearing Xi's stamp have escalated this conflict. The first is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013. The BRI aims to enhance China's access to raw materials and boost its exports by developing transportation and logistics infrastructure across Eurasia, Africa, and Latin America. Within the BRI framework, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), established in 2015 with one-third of its financing provided by China, aims to be an alternative to the U.S.-controlled World Bank, which has traditionally exerted significant influence over large-scale infrastructure projects in peripheral and semi-peripheral countries. To date, 148 countries have joined the BRI by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the PRC.[97] However, it is essential to remember that most of these countries are

cessed November 1, 2022).

94 Sun Yu, Eleanor Olcott,and Donato Paolo Mancini, "Moderna Refused China Request to Reveal Vaccine Technology," October 2, 2022, https://on.ft.com/3dSUfV2 (accessed October 2, 2022).

95 "China OKs its First mRNA Vaccine, from Drugmaker CSPC," March 22, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-approves-its-first-mrna-vaccine-domestic-drugmaker-cspc-2023-03-22/#:~:text=BEIJING%2C%20March%2022%20(Reuters),shots%20to%20support%20domestic%20research (accessed March 25, 2023).

96 "Shanghai Eases Covid Restrictions As Two-month Lockdown Ends," June 1, 2022, https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20220601-shanghai-eases-covid-restrictions-as-two-month-long-lockdown-ends (accessed November 1, 2022).

97 Christoph Nedopil, "Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative," https://greenfdc.org/countries-

not necessarily "pro-China" but seek to benefit from the U.S.-China competition by obtaining cheap loans and grants from China.

The BRI faces several significant challenges. The Chinese state struggles to collect the loans it has provided under the initiative. Debtor states use the leverage of approaching the West to secure concessions such as loan postponements and cancellations. In addition to the ongoing – and aggravating– domestic debt problem, unpaid BRI loans strain China's government finances significantly.[98] Furthermore, as seen in cases like Sri Lanka, when the Chinese state attempted to seize infrastructure built with uncollected loans, it was accused of being "imperialist" by Western media and governments. China tends to back down quickly due to these allegations.[99]

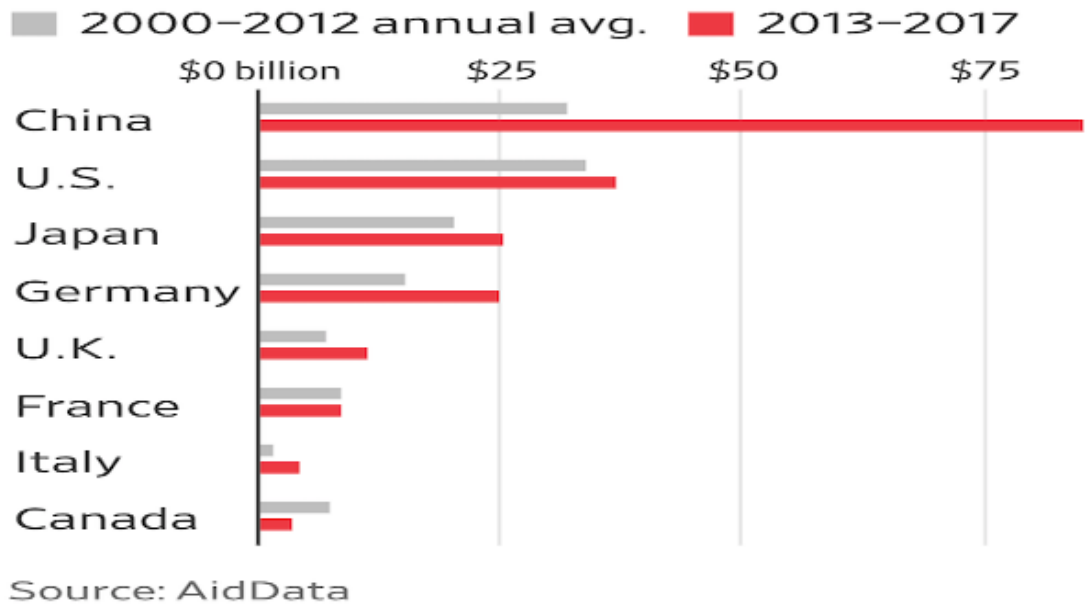

Figure 6. International development finance provided by China and the G7 countries, 2000-2017 (Billion USD)[100]

The "Made in China 2025" strategic plan announced in 2015 was Xi's most critical step to compete with imperialist economies. This plan aims to shift China from low-tech and low-value-added production based on semi-skilled and cheap labor to high-tech and high-value-added production based on skilled labor. In this

of-the-belt-and-road-initiative-bri/ (accessed August 23, 2023).

98Lingling Wei, "China Reins In Its Belt and Road Program, $1 Trillion Later," September 26, 2022, https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-belt-road-debt-11663961638 (accessed September 26, 2022).

99 Deborah Brautigam and Meg Rithmire, "The Chinese 'Debt Trap' Is a Myth," February 6, 2021, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2021/02/china-debt-trap-diplomacy/617953/ (accessed February 9, 2021).

100 Ibid.

context, the goals of increasing the country's self-sufficiency rate to 70% in 2025 in products determined as "main materials," especially semiconductors (microchips), and dominating the world technology market in 2049, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.[101] Considering that technological superiority is one of the defining features of imperialist economies,[102] the Chinese state's quest for technological development must be understood as a crucial part of a broader attempt to join the imperialist league.

The imperialist camp reacted sharply to "Made in China 2025" and the Belt and Road Initiative. Donald Trump started the trade war against China on July 6, 2018, by placing an additional 25% tariff on $34 billion worth of products from China. In the following period, extra customs duties were imposed.[103] Significant steps have been taken to weaken China's leading high-tech manufacturing companies, such as Huawei and ZTE. ZTE was sentenced to pay 1 billion 190 million USD in compensation to the USA on the grounds that it did not comply with the U.S. sanctions against Iran and North Korea.[104] As a result of the USA's complaint for the same reason, Meng Wanzhou, the daughter of the founder of the Huawei company and its senior manager, was kept under house arrest in Canada between 2018-2021.[105] The US blacklisted Huawei in 2019, banning the sale of key technologies, especially microchips, to this company.[106]

Joe Biden took the war that Trump started to a higher level. On October 7, 2022, the Biden administration brought the condition of obtaining permission from the US to sell microchips produced using US technology to Chinese companies, wherever they are in the world. Within the scope of this ban, obstacles were placed in front of US citizens and green card holders from working in microchip production in China.[107] Given the enormous power of the United States in semiconductor production, this

101 James McBride and Andrew Chatzky, "Is 'Made in China 2025' a Threat to Global Trade?," May 13, 2019, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/made-china-2025-threat-global-trade (accessed December 21, 2021).

102 On the differences between imperialist and non-imperialist economies, see Guglielmo Carchedi and Michael Roberts, "The Economics of Modern Imperialism," *Historical Materialism*, vol: 29, no: 4, 2021, pp. 23-69; Levent Dölek, "The Myth of Russian Imperialism: Why Neutrality on the Ukraine War is Wrong," *Revolutionary Marxism 2022*, pp. 42-47. For a comprehensive review of the technological dimension of imperialism and analysis of the non-imperialist character of Chinese capitalism, see Sam King, *Imperialism and the Development Myth: How Rich Countries Dominate in the Twenty-First Century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021. For a detailed account of China's semi-peripheral character, see Minqi Li, "China: Imperialism or Semi-Periphery?," July 1, 2021, https://monthlyreview.org/2021/07/01/china-imperialism-or-semi-periphery/ (accessed October 12, 2021).

103 "US-China Trade War Timeline: Key Dates and Events Since July 2018," August 29, 2021, https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3146489/us-china-trade-war-timeline-key-dates-and-events-july-2018 (accessed December 21, 2021).

104 Paul Mozur and Cecilia Kang, "U.S. Fines ZTE of China $1.19 Billion for Breaching Sanctions," March 7, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/07/technology/zte-china-fine.html (accessed December 21, 2021).

105 "Huawei Executive Meng Wanzhou Freed by Canada Arrives Home in China," September 25, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-58690974 (accessed December 21, 2021).

106 "US-China Trade War Timeline."

107 Alan Beattie, "Biden Goes It Alone in His Trade Assault on China," October 20, 2022, https://on.ft.com/3MJC9BE (accessed October 31, 2022).

decision is understandable as a comprehensive embargo on China. These regulations have already strained China's technological development. Huawei, which was said to shake Apple's dominance just a few years ago, could not achieve its 5G modernization goals because of US sanctions and even fell back against Apple in China's domestic market.[108]

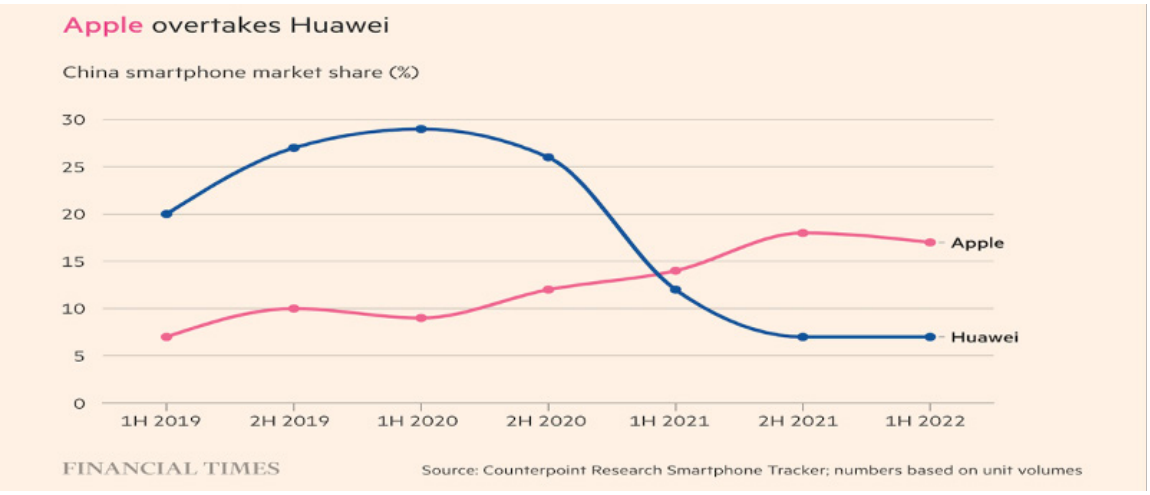

Figure 7. The share of Apple and Huawei in China's domestic market from 2019 to the first half of 2022[109]

In addition to the economic war, China has also faced a comprehensive military/geopolitical siege by the West. The "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue" (Quad), established in 2007 with the participation of the USA, Australia, Japan, and India, was defined as the "Asia-Pacific NATO" by China.[110] However, Quad was short-lived and failed to translate into tangible collaboration. The Quad pact, revived by Trump in 2017, has sought expansion since 2020 by including Brazil, South Korea, Israel, Vietnam, and New Zealand in its summit meetings.[111] The US, Britain, and Australia formed the Aukus pact against China in the Indo-Pacific region in 2021.[112] More importantly, NATO put China on target. The communiqué of NATO's Brussels Summit on June 14, 2021, stated: "China's stated ambitions and assertive behaviour present systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to

108 Qianer Liu, "Huawei to Relaunch 5G Phone Despite US Sanctions," October 6, 2022, https://on.ft.com/3Ep3nvc (accessed October 6, 2022).
109 Patrick McGee and Ryan McMorrow, "Apple's Bargain with Beijing: Access to China's Factories — and Consumers," November 8, 2022, https://on.ft.com/3DRqgp5 (accessed November 8, 2022).
110 Yao Zeyu and Zhang Tengjun, "US Attempt to Upgrade Quad to an Asia-Pacific NATO Destined to Fail," May 23, 2022, https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1266370.shtml (accessed October 31, 2022).
111 Jagannath Panda, "Making 'Quad Plus' a Reality," January 13, 2022, https://thediplomat.com/2022/01/making-quad-plus-a-reality/ (accessed October 31, 2022).
112 "Aukus: UK, US and Australia Launch Pact to Counter China," September 16, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-58564837 (accessed October 31, 2022).

areas relevant to Alliance security."[113]The communiqué of NATO's Madrid Summit on June 29, 2022, declared: "We face systemic competition from those, including the People's Republic of China, who challenge our interests, security, and values and seek to undermine the rules-based international order."[114] The communiqué of the Vilnius Summit on July 11, 2023, repeated the same argument: "The People's Republic of China's (PRC) stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values."[115]

An alternative global investment framework is also on the agenda to prevent the Belt-Road Initiative from bringing peripheral and semi-peripheral countries closer to China. For this purpose, the USA, Japan, and Australia established the "Blue Dot Network" in November 2019.[116] A new initiative called "Build Back Better World" (B3W) was launched at the G7 summit in July 2021, which brought together the USA, Germany, Britain, Italy, Japan, Canada and France.[117]

China was also targeted because it continued its economic and political relations with Russia after the Ukraine War.[118] Finally, the Taiwan question, which brought China and the United States to the brink of war in 1996, began to itch again. The visit of Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the United States House of Representatives, to Taiwan in August 2022 can be interpreted as an exercise in the US' future diplomatic recognition of Taiwan's independence.[119] Xi Jinping has repeatedly declared that if this happens, he will not hesitate to go to war to connect Taiwan to the mainland.[120] Xinjiang's strategic importance in the context of the Belt-Road Initiative should also be kept in mind, with Tibet being a critical region for the Sino-Indian border conflict. The repressive attitude of the Chinese state in these areas gave a serious trump card to the imperialists. The Western press and governments have launched a severe propaganda attack on these issues in recent years.

113 NATO, "Brussels Summit Communiqué," June 14, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm (accessed October 31, 2022).
114 NATO, "Madrid Summit Declaration," June 29, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm (accessed October 31, 2022).
115 NATO, "Vilnius Summit Communiqué," July 11, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm (accessed August 28, 2023).
116 Kaush Arha, "A Hidden Key to the G7's Infrastructure Ambitions: Blue Dot Network," June 12, 2021, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/a-hidden-key-to-the-g7s-infrastructure-ambitions-blue-dot-network/ (accessed March 1, 2022).
117 Mordechai Chaziza, "The 'Build Back Better World': An Alternative to China's BRI for the Middle East?," July 20, 2021, https://www.mei.edu/publications/build-back-better-world-alternative-chinas-bri-middle-east (accessed November 12, 2021).
118 "'Gigantic Mistake': Biden Warned China's Xi Over Aiding Russia," September 19, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/19/gigantic-mistake-biden-warned-chinas-xi-over-aiding-russia (accessed October 31, 2022).
119 Yılmaz Tan, "Çip Savaşından Askeri Gerilime Tayvan'da Ne Oluyor?," September 21, 2022, https://gercekgazetesi1.net/uluslararasi/cip-savasindan-askeri-gerilime-tayvanda-ne-oluyor (accessed October 31, 2022).
120 Ben Blanchard and Yimou Lee, "China's Xi Threatens Taiwan with Force but also Seeks Peaceful 'Reunification'," January 2, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-taiwan-idUSKCN1OW04K (accessed October 31, 2022).

The significance of the 20th Congress

The abovementioned issues shadowed the CCP 20th Congress. X's primary expectation from Congress was to eliminate the term limits, known as the "two-term rule," allowing him to remain at the helm of the party-state as long as his health permits. As is known, similar to the governance structure adopted by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union after Stalin, the Chinese Communist Party transitioned from a personality-based rule under Mao to a collective dictatorship of the bureaucracy under Deng Xiaoping. Although Deng managed the party and the state from behind the scenes until he died in 1997, even when he held no official positions, he believed that the collective rule by the bureaucracy was more suitable for ensuring the regime's stability than a one-man rule. In 1982, Deng secured an amendment to the constitution to limit the presidential term to two terms, i.e., ten years. However, in China, the presidency is essentially a symbolic position, while the real power lies in the hands of the Party General Secretary. No specific rules were imposed regarding the General Secretary's term. Since 1993, the positions of General Secretary and President have been held by the same individuals, which led to the assumption that the two-term rule applied to both posts. However, there has never been a strictly binding second-term rule for general secretaries. It could be described more as a customary practice. In 2018, Xi prepared the groundwork to eliminate this tradition by amending the constitution and removing the term limit for the President.[121] From that moment on, the term of office ceased to be a legal matter and became a critical battleground within the party-state power struggle.

Xi Jinping saw the 20th Congress as a golden opportunity to deal a decisive blow to his (already significantly weakened) rivals within the party. Recognizing the influence of retired cadres in power struggles within the party since the Deng era, Xi knew the necessity of bringing that group under control. As mentioned earlier, Hu Jintao headed the Communist Youth League faction, and Jiang Zemin led the Shanghai faction.[122] Therefore, silencing the retired leaders and officials was crucial for Xi's political fate. For this reason, six months before the Congress, the CCP Central Committee General Office (also known as the "Central Office") issued a regulation titled "Strengthening Party Building Among Retired Cadres in the New Era." This regulation directed retired cadres "not to discuss the general policies of the Party Central Committee in an open manner, not to spread political negative remarks, not to participate in the activities of illegal social organisations, and not to use their former authority or position influence to seek benefits for themselves and others, and resolutely oppose and resist all kinds of wrong thinking."[123] In short, the regulation instructed former officials to remain silent on any matter Xi might find displeasing.

Adding a ban on public speeches to the already looming threat of corruption

121 Ling Li, "The Muddled Case Against Xi Jinping's Third Term," March 31, 2022, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/cff/2022/03/31/the-muddled-case-against-xi-jinpings-third-term/ (accessed November 11, 2022).

122 Jiang Zemin died on November 30, 2022.

123 Guo Rui, "Retired Cadres Warned About 'Negative' Speeches," *South China Morning Post*, May 17, 2022.

further helped to undermine the influence of retired cadres. However, there was a notable exception to this rule. Song Ping, the oldest and most senior cadre of the CCP, aged 105, stated in a video message released in September 2022 that the policy of reform and opening-up "has been the only path to the development and progress of contemporary China and the only path to the realization of the Chinese dream." Song, who played a crucial role in bringing the Hu-Wen duo to power, interpreted this statement as a warning to Xi not to deviate from the path of the previous administrations.[124] Following this statement, rumors circulated that the former cadres were taking action to overthrow Xi. In the lead-up to the Congress, media affiliated with the Falun Gong organization (a right-wing opposition group with considerable underground activity in the mainland and a strong diaspora presence, particularly in North America) alleged that Song Ping, Hu Jintao, and Wen Jiabao were involved in a coup attempt against Xi.[125] The US-controlled Radio Free Asia also published a piece claiming that the Hu-Wen team was planning a successful coup to overthrow Xi.[126]

Song Ping at the 20th Congress

In addition to the internal unrest within the party, an individual protest just three days before the 20th Congress cast a shadow over the event. On October 13, 2022, two banners were hung by a protester on Beijing's Sitong Bridge. One banner read: "We want to eat, not do coronavirus tests; reform, not the Cultural Revolution. We want

124 Katsuji Nakawaza, "Analysis: 105-year-old Party Elder Sends Blunt Message to Xi," September 29, 2022, https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/China-up-close/Analysis-105-year-old-party-elder-sends-blunt-message-to-Xi (accessed November 8, 2022).
125 Helen Davidson, "China Becomes 'Hothouse' of Intrigue Ahead of Crucial Communist Party Congress," September 26, 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/26/china-becomes-hothouse-of-intrigue-ahead-of-crucial-communist-party-congress (accessed October 23, 2022).
126 Liang Jing, "胡温联手，习近平大势已去，二十大成功有望," September 27, 2022, https://www.rfa.org/cantonese/commentaries/lj/com-09272022094621.html?encoding=simplified (accessed October 23, 2022).

freedom, not lockdowns; elections, not rulers. We want dignity, not lies. Be citizens, not enslaved people." The other banner directly targeted Xi: "Remove dictator and national traitor Xi Jinping." The protester was swiftly detained, but despite the state's tight digital control, news of the incident spread rapidly. Sympathizing with the protest, many people drew a parallel between the protester and the "Tank Man," the unidentified individual who bravely stood before the tanks in Tiananmen Square on June 5, 1989.[127] This incident demonstrated that the suppressed anger among the people could erupt unexpectedly, hinting at the first signs of an emerging wave of protests following the Congress.

An individual protest at the Sitong Bridge in Beijing short before the 20th Congress (October 13, 2022)

A test case for Xi's degree of dominance within the party was the election of the seven-member Politburo Standing Committee, the highest organ of the CCP. The question of who would become the second figure in the party, that is, the person who would take over as the head of the State Council (Prime Minister), was significant. The current Premier, Li Keqiang, who came from the Communist Youth League (and hence was close to the Hu-Wen duo), could not prevent Xi's rise to one-man rule. Still, he acted autonomously on specific issues to somewhat balance Xi's power. However, Xi did not want to work with a Premier who would potentially balance his authority. Therefore, the identity of the second-in-command within the Politburo Standing Committee was crucial. There were three candidates for this position. While it was known that Xi's candidate was Li Qiang, it was speculated that rival factions supported Hu Chunhua and Wang Yang (especially Hu). It was a subject of curiosity whether Xi would abandon Li Qiang, who was

127 Christian Shepherd, "'New Tank Man': Rare Protest in Beijing Mars Xi Jinping's Moment," October 14, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/14/china-protest-sitong-bridge-haidian/ (accessed October 16, 2022).

perceived to have mishandled the COVID-19 outbreak in Shanghai and opt for Hu Chunhua. However, Xi did not change his decision and appointed Li as the second-in-command within the Politburo Standing Committee.[128] In short, the Congress consolidated Xi's dominance over the party.

Another point worth mentioning about the Congress is the absence of symbolic representation of women in party leadership. Thus far, no woman has been elected to the Politburo Standing Committee. However, women could be elected to the larger and less powerful Politburo. Unlike the previous four congresses, no woman was elected to the Politburo in the 20th Congress.[129]

When Hu Jintao was hastily escorted out of the congress, Xi and Li avoided eye contact (October22, 2022).

The most talked-about moment of the Congress was when Hu Jintao, sitting next to Xi due to his former position as General Secretary, was hastily removed from the venue on the last day. Footage captured by cameras showed Hu attempting to open a file in front of him. He was first prevented by Li Zhanshu, the third-ranking official in the party, and then forcibly escorted out of the hall despite his objections. During this incident, Xi Jinping and others in the room appeared indifferent and cold. The true nature of the incident may never come to light. Nevertheless, this event, occurring precisely when retired cadres were being controlled, became one of the symbols of Xi's efforts to establish absolute dominance over the party.

The significance of Hu Jintao's removal lies in its potential implications of Xi

128 Ceren Ergenç, "Çin'in Yeni 'İkinci Adam'ı Kim Olacak?," August 30, 2022, https://www.evrensel.net/yazi/91509/cinin-yeni-ikinci-adami-kim-olacak (accessed November 8, 2022).
129 Alexandra Stevenson, "Leadership Changes Reveal That in China, Men Still Rule," October 23, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/23/world/asia/women-china-party-congress.html (accessed November 8, 2022).

Jinping consolidating his authority and sending a clear message of his control over the party. The incident showcased Xi's determination to eliminate any perceived opposition or dissent within the party ranks and solidify his position as the paramount leader. The removal of a former General Secretary, who once held the most powerful position in the party, demonstrated the extent to which Xi was willing to assert his control and authority. While the specific reasons behind Hu Jintao's removal may remain undisclosed, its timing and handling spoke volumes about Xi's quest for unchallenged supremacy.

Attempts to build a personality cult

After these notes, we can move on to the congressional documents. The report presented by Xi Jinping on the first day of the Congress and the new Party Constitution adopted on the last day of Congress are critical documents related to the economic and political issues and intra-party conflicts we discussed throughout the article. It is customary for CCP general secretaries to praise themselves after highlighting the achievements of previous administrations in their congress reports. The same happened at this convention. In his report, Xi presents the party's history as a success story that has reached a new high at every stage. After these customary praises, however, Xi made the following veiled (but harsh) criticisms of the Hu-Wen administration:

> A decade ago this was the situation we faced:
> Great achievements had been secured in reform, opening up, and socialist modernization, and notable advances had been made in the great new project of Party building. All this had created solid foundations, favorable conditions, and key underpinnings for our continued progress.
> At the same time, however, a number of prominent issues and problems—some of which had been building for years and others which were just emerging—demanded urgent action.
> 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.
> China's economy was beset by acute structural and institutional problems. Development was imbalanced, uncoordinated, and unsustainable, and the traditional development model could no longer keep us moving forward. Some deep-seated problems in institutions and barriers built by vested interests were becoming more and more apparent.
> Some people lacked confidence in the socialist political system with Chinese characteristics, and, all too often, we saw laws being ignored or not being strictly enforced.
> Misguided patterns of thinking such as money worship, hedonism, egocentricity, and historical nihilism were common, and online discourse was rife with disorder. All this had a grave impact on people's thinking and the public opinion environment.

> Our work to ensure the people's wellbeing was fraught with weak links. Tightening resource and environmental constraints and environmental pollution were pronounced.
> The systems for safeguarding national security were inadequate, and our capacity for responding to various major risks was insufficient. Many shortcomings were affecting the modernization of national defense and the military.
> The institutions and mechanisms for implementing the policy of One Country, Two Systems in Hong Kong and Macao were not well-developed, and China faced grave challenges to its national security.
> These were just some of the problems we faced. Back then, many people, both in and outside of our Party, were worried about the future of the Party and the country.[130]

In the continuation of his speech, Xi claims that decisive and successful steps were taken to solve these problems during his term. He then presents his rule as the third major period of the People's Republic of China, after the periods of Mao and Deng:

> Based on our decades of exploration and practice since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, especially since the launch of reform and opening up in 1978, as well as the new breakthroughs made in theory and practice since the 18th National Congress, we have succeeded in advancing and expanding Chinese modernization.[131]

The new CCP Constitution adopted at the congress also presents Xi as the third most important leader in the party's history:

> The Communist Party of China uses Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, the Scientific Outlook on Development, and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as its guides to action.[132]

The "Theory of Three Represents" referred to here was formulated by Jiang Zemin, and the "Scientific Outlook on Development" was put forward by Hu Jintao. However, since Jiang and Hu did not dare to equate themselves with Mao and Deng, they did not add their names to the beginning of their ideas and did not pretend to be the lead theorists. On the other hand, Xi put his name next to Mao and Deng, aiming to mark a "New Era" that he implies will last a long time. In keeping with this approach, the Party Constitution describes Xi as the core of the party leadership:

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130 Xi Jinping, "Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects (Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China)," October 16, 2022," https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202210/t20221025_10791908.html (accessed October 25, 2022), pp. 4-5.
131 Ibid., p. 18.
132 "Constitution of the Communist Party of China (Revised and Adopted at the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on October 22, 2022)," October 22, 2022, https://news.cgtn.com/news/files/Full-text-of-Constitution-of-Communist-Party-of-China.pdf (accessed October 25, 2022), p. 1.

> Party members must fulfill the following obligations:
> 1) Conscientiously study Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, the Scientific Outlook on Development, and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, study the Party's lines, principles, policies, and resolutions, acquire a fundamental knowledge of the Party, study the history of the Party, improve their general, scientific, legal, and professional knowledge, and work diligently to strengthen their ability to serve the people.
> 2) Strengthen consciousness of the need to maintain political integrity, think in big-picture terms, follow the leadership core, and keep in alignment with the central Party leadership; stay confident in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics; and uphold Comrade Xi Jinping's core position on the Party Central Committee and in the Party as a whole and uphold the Central Committee's authority and its centralized, unified leadership. Implement the Party's basic line, principles, and policies, take the lead in reform, opening up, and socialist modernization, encourage the people to work hard for economic development and social progress, and play an exemplary and vanguard role in production, work, study, and social activities.[133]

In short, parallel to political transformations in other capitalist countries, Xi Jinping expects total obedience to his one-man rule to stabilize Chinese capitalism, which has been under the twin pressures of the Third Great Depression and rising geopolitical tensions between China and the West. One remarkable aspect of the report is the frequent positive references to China's "traditional culture." As Marxism and communism have become hollow symbols parallel to capitalist restoration, the party-state attempts to draw from China's traditional culture, especially from cultural-ideological sources such as Confucianism. Under Xi's rule, the emphasis on traditional culture has become more prominent. China's traditional culture is not uniform; it contains conflicting elements. However, what Xi refers to as traditional culture bears significant parallels with the cultural policies of many emperors throughout China's imperial history and the counter-revolutionary Guomindang in the 1930s and 1940s. The reference to traditional culture implies the endorsement of a hierarchical culture that preaches the obedience of the poor to the rich, women to men, and subordinates to superiors, with superiors showing mercy to those below them.[134]

As we saw before, on the one hand, Xi attacked the gains of the working class. Still, on the other hand, he attempted to establish hegemony over workers by addressing themes such as fair income distribution, equal opportunities, and combating the illegitimate activities of capitalists. Xi's report presented to Congress paints a similar picture: "We will promote equality of opportunity, increase the incomes of low-income earners, and expand the size of the middle-income group." However, a remark contradicting this statement appears on the next page: "The statutory

133 "Constitution of the Communist Party of China," p. 18.
134 On the promotion of traditional Chinese culture in the Xi era, see Zi Yang, "Xi Jinping and China's Traditionalist Restoration," *China Brief*, vol: 17, no: 9, July 7, 2017, pp. 9-13; Zhuoran Li, "The Sixth Plenum and the Rise of Traditional Chinese Culture in Socialist Ideology," November 19, 2021, https://thediplomat.com/2021/11/the-sixth-plenum-and-the-rise-of-traditional-chinese-culture-in-socialist-ideology/ (accessed November 25, 2022).

retirement age will be gradually raised."[135] This latter statement shows Xi's actual stance vis-à-vis the Chinese proletariat.

The goal to join the imperialist league

We discussed above the content of the technological breakthrough China is trying to make to join the imperialist league and the effect of this effort on the competition between Chinese semi-peripheral capitalism and imperialism. In his report, Xi correctly acknowledged that "China's capacity for scientific and technological innovation is not yet strong enough." He then sets concrete and short-term goals to make China an imperialist economy:

> China's overall development objectives for the year 2035 are as follows:
> Significantly increase economic strength, scientific and technological capabilities, and composite national strength; substantially grow the per capita GDP to be on par with that of a mid-level developed country.
> Join the ranks of the world's most innovative countries, with great self-reliance and strength in science and technology.[136]

These objectives are hard to attain. As the hierarchical structure of the world economy has increasingly solidified in the age of imperialism, transitioning from the semi-periphery to the core of the world system is extremely difficult. Putin's Russia serves as a recent example of this phenomenon. Shortly after assuming the presidency of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin set a goal to raise Russia's per capita income to the level of Portugal's –which was the poorest country in the European Union at that time– by the end of his second term, i.e., within 12 years. However, despite the economic challenges faced by Portugal because of the European debt crisis in 2009-10, the gap between Russia and Portugal widened rather than narrowed. As of 2021, Portugal's per capita income is twice that of Russia.[137]

Xi Jinping's goal of elevating China to a "mid-level developed country" status within a similar 12-year timeframe sounds like Putin's unfulfilled objectives. On the other hand, when Putin announced his goal, Russia had been grappling with economic stagnation for nearly 40 years. In contrast, Xi set that target for one of the world's fastest-growing economies, even though it experienced a significant slowdown after the 2008 crisis. Therefore, while Xi's goal is undeniably challenging, it remains within the realm of possibility, which is precisely why the rivalry between the imperialist bloc and China carries substantial economic and geopolitical risks.

135 Xi, "Hold High," pp. 40-41.
136 Ibid., p. 19.
137 Michael Roberts, "Russia Under Putin," August 15, 2022, https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2022/08/15/russia-under-putin/ (accessed October 1, 2022).

The protest wave of November 2022 and the future of the Chinese Revolution: Results and prospects

In *Results and Prospects*, written shortly after Russia's 1905 Revolution, Leon Trotsky made ambitious predictions regarding the world revolution based on his theory of uneven and combined development. According to Trotsky, the level of development of capitalism was not directly proportional to the proletariat's consciousness. In advanced capitalist countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, despite their numerical superiority, proletarians could not break free from bourgeois hegemony. In late-tsarist Russia, where feudal and capitalist structures intertwined and industry was still underdeveloped, the bourgeoisie failed to establish hegemony. At the same time, the Russian proletariat, despite being numerically weak, achieved a high level of class consciousness. Trotsky argued that it was not possible for the Russian bourgeoisie, heavily dependent on large landowners and the Tsarist regime, to carry out land reform or grant the right to self-determination to oppressed nations under the empire. The proletariat could pave the way to power by exploiting these political weaknesses of the bourgeoisie. Based on this analysis, Trotsky accurately foresaw that the proletariat would come to power in Russia before the West. In *The Permanent Revolution*, written in 1929, Trotsky applied the law of uneven and combined development to colonial and semi-colonial countries and concluded that revolutionary consequences similar to those in Russia would occur in societies shaken by the contradictions of transitioning from feudalism to capitalism. This prediction was confirmed by the chain of revolutions extending from Eastern Europe to China and Cuba after the Second World War.[138]

The conditions in present-day China significantly differ from when Trotsky made the abovementioned predictions. It is not the painful contradictions of the transition from feudalism to capitalism but rather the internal class contradictions generated by Chinese capitalism and the contradictions with the existing imperialist powers due to the PRC's goal of becoming imperialist that are on the agenda. Despite this difference, the law of uneven and combined development continues to operate in China. Although capitalist restoration has been completed, the economic and political dynamics it has brought forth seem to pose significant obstacles to bourgeois hegemony in China. A Chinese revolutionary Marxist using the pseudonym Lao Xie succinctly pointed to this in an interview conducted with him in 2017:

> I think the main thing is not the size of China's working class or the number of strikes. In the early twentieth century, there were many more industrial workers and strikes in the US than in Russia, yet it was only in Russia that a social revolution took place. I think China's value lies in its situation where multiple factors are in play at the same time. Its various social forces and classes are still taking shape and the boundaries between them, the rules for distributing interests and their understandings of one another are all still in flux. The bourgeois state and its

138 Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution & Results and Prospects*, https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/index.htm (accessed August 29, 2023).

ideology, including "civil society," are still just being built.[139]

Lao Xie describes the distinctive features of the Xi era in the context of this uneven and combined development:

> This is how I would summarize the political situation over the past four years: Chairman Xi has begun to carry out state-building (建设国家). Prior to this, the Chinese government was like a protracted provisional government, from Deng's market reforms all the way up until Chairman Hu stepped down [in 2012]. The task of state-building kept getting postponed. A sort of bourgeois state gradually came into being, but it was like the frame of a house: it had a roof, but there was no glass in the windows, and the interior wasn't furnished at all. People could live inside, they could even invite some guests over, but…. If you say "incomplete bourgeois state," that could be misunderstood as meaning the bourgeoisie hadn't formed yet. It had formed, but especially on the spiritual level, its tentacles hadn't yet penetrated deep into the minds of the people. It hadn't yet established a complete set of rules and regulations for long-term planning. Chairman Xi is finally attempting to build a long-term state. In this sense, I think you could say that Chairman Xi is a founding father (国父). He's trying to build something that could last for hundreds of years.[140]

Xi's policies explored in this paper aim precisely at such a quest for stability. However, the internal and external contradictions created by the Third Great Depression made his job difficult. These contradictions offer significant opportunities to the Chinese proletariat, which rose in the early 2000s:

> The group at the core of China's ruling class has clearly expressed its intention to continue monopolizing state power into the foreseeable future, determining that its contradictions with other fractions of the class cannot be smoothly worked out through the principles of "political pluralism." At the same time, this group is actively attempting to learn from the old capitalist world. And like the rest of that world, China is entering a period of retreat from "globalization." International interests are being reorganized. All these factors are generating multiple levels of internal tensions across Chinese society. Society has not yet settled into a condition where everything follows rules that people regard as natural and unassailable. I think this is the reason that China has a special, perhaps unique value for the class struggle. If it were just a matter of the number of workers or strikes, then India, Indonesia or Vietnam might be more important, but no other country has quite this combination of factors at play as we see in China today.[…] There's definitely an opportunity. In Chinese we say "the wind and water flow in one direction for a while, and then they switch" (风水轮流转). Capitalist rule, after having undergone 25 years of unprecedented stability, is clearly beginning to waver (动摇).[141]

Class struggles and mass demonstrations that occurred shortly before and right

139 "A State Adequate to the Task," p. 285. The main issue is not whether the information provided in Lao Xie's comparison of the USA and Russia is accurate. His criticism of a mechanistic understanding of revolutionary politics and emphasis on uneven and combined development is noteworthy.
140 Ibid., pp. 330-331.
141 Ibid., p. 286, 350.

after the 20th Congress vividly confirmed Lao Xie's observations. These struggles reveal a complex picture where the issues we have discussed throughout this article (such as semi-peripheral character of the Chinese capitalism, increasing contradictions between capital and labor during the Third Great Depression, the escalating Uyghur national question, and the rising state violence during Xi's era) are intertwined. As explained above, China's "zero COVID" policy based on lockdowns protected the country from a significant public health disaster and economic devastation throughout 2020 and early 2021. However, it was clear that this strategy would fail if not supported by a robust vaccination program.

Xi's administration implemented an import-substitution policy, aiming to allow local companies to produce mRNA vaccines instead of permitting the import of mRNA vaccines. Nevertheless, due to China's scientific and technological backwardness compared to the West, relying on import substitution amid a public health crisis like the pandemic was a considerable gamble. Xi planned to manage the process with lockdowns until domestically produced mRNA vaccines were available and then present it as a victory against the West. However, his project crashed against the wall of China's semi-peripheral character. As I noted, the first locally produced mRNA vaccine was approved after the end of the pandemic. In other words, Xi lost the vaccine gamble. This failure compelled the state to impose increasingly oppressive measures to enforce prolonged lockdowns, exhausting the people and provoking dissatisfaction and resistance.

The failure of China's pandemic management, from an early success story to a massive disappointment, deeply affected other significant issues discussed in this article. Firstly, as the negative impact of lockdowns on the economy increased, the state prioritized keeping factories open (especially in export-oriented sectors). However, after each reopening, COVID-19 cases surged due to inadequate working and living conditions in factories. This situation forced the seemingly suppressed working class to struggle for survival. Capitalists announced significant wage raises to attract the workers back into factories. Yet, capital's failure to fulfill such promises due to the ongoing economic bottlenecks intensified workers' struggles. The collapse of the pandemic policy aggravated other problems discussed in this article. The "zero COVID" policy was always applied more strictly in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, intertwined with national repression. On the other hand, the increasing suppression of already limited academic freedoms and student organizations during the Xi era was causing significant unrest among a broad spectrum of the youth, particularly university students, before the pandemic. The prolonged pandemic lockdowns, including in schools, made all these issues ripe for ignition with just a spark.

The industrial proletariat lit the first spark that brought the Chinese people to the streets. As known, Foxconn, a Taiwanese-owned corporation, manufactures Apple-designed products in giant factories in China that resemble small cities with hundreds of thousands of workers employed. When production costs increased due to worker struggles in factories in Guangdong province, Foxconn shifted its production to regions in the central and western parts of the country where wages were lower. However, workers' struggles also occurred in these regions. Approximately 200,000

workers were employed at the Foxconn factory in Zhengzhou city in Henan province, known as the "iPhone City." Around 100,000 workers, unhappy with frequent exposure to quarantines and poor living conditions during quarantines, left the factory in mass numbers starting in mid-October 2022. Concerned about production coming to a halt, the Chinese state, providing a striking example of its state capitalist character, initially sent lower-level party-state cadres and officials to work at the Foxconn factory.

However, this practice did not solve the labor shortage problem. Foxconn management then offered significant wage increases and promised to improve housing conditions, which enabled the company to hire around 100,000 new workers. After production resumed, Foxconn started to backtrack. Contrary to promises, the coexistence and housing of old and new workers in the factory led to the continuation of the COVID-19 outbreak and lockdowns. The management also began to delay paying the promised wages and benefits, which workers were eager to receive before the Chinese New Year. On November 22, 2022, the accumulated anger of Foxconn workers erupted. Unable to deal with the workers, the management first deployed the security guards. After workers repelled them, the police intervened. The workers clashed with the police and security personnel for three days. During the clashes, the workers destroyed the factory's security cabins and COVID-19 test sites. The struggle ended successfully, as Foxconn management agreed to provide even higher wages and benefits and deposit them directly into workers' bank accounts.[142] The successful struggle at Foxconn was the first significant response to Xi's anti-labor policies.

Foxconn workers clashed with security personnel wearing white isolation suits.

142 "[深度分析] 郑州富士康工人的阶级斗争（一)," November 25, 2022, https://telegra.ph/Jinzhao-Deep-in-Analysis-The-Class-Struggle-of-Foxconn-Workers-in-Zhengzhou-part-I-11-25 (accessed November 28, 2022).

While the successful struggle of the Foxconn workers lit the fire, the tipping point that triggered the wave of unrest after the 20th Congress occurred in Xinjiang. On November 24, a fire broke out in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, killing ten people. It was reported that due to quarantine measures, the building entrance was closed; hence, the residents could not leave the building. Also, fire engines couldn't reach the area in time due to lockdown-related barricades on the roads. The day after the tragedy, during a press conference, an official blamed the apartment residents for the incident, leading to widespread anger.[143]

Protests were held in Urumqi on November 25, and starting on November 26, thousands of people took to the streets nationwide. Mass demonstrations were organized on over 50 university campuses.[144]These demonstrations targeted Xi's administration for its failure, recklessness, and oppressive actions in managing the pandemic. In some places, slogans directed against the regime were chanted. For instance, on the evening of November 27, in Beijing, around 100 people marched towards Tiananmen Square, chanting slogans such as "We want universal values," "We want freedom, equality, democracy, rule of law," "We don't want dictatorship," "We don't want personality cult."[145] On the same night in Shanghai, protesters chanted slogans like "No dictatorship, we want democracy. We don't need a dictator we want voting rights."[146]

143 Manya Koetse, "The 11.24 Urumqi Fire: Mourning and Anger at Lives Lost in Apartment Building Inferno," November 25, 2022, https://www.whatsonweibo.com/the-11-24-urumqi-fire-mourning-and-anger-at-lives-lost-in-apartment-building-inferno/ (accessed November 28, 2022).
144 https://twitter.com/vivianwubeijing/status/1596756273730502657 (accessed November 28, 2022).
145 https://twitter.com/SiminaMistreanu/status/1596912559399268353 (accessed November 28, 2022).
146 https://twitter.com/vivianwubeijing/status/1596610080350535680 (accessed November 28, 2022).

One participant in the demonstrations in Shanghai displayed a Mao poster (November 27, 2022)

Panicked by the protest wave and its potential to spread further and take a regime-challenging direction, the Chinese government hastily declared victory over COVID-19. It ended all "zero COVID" measures, such as mass testing and lockdowns. When defending "zero COVID," Chinese official media stressed the value of saving lives and avoiding severe long-term public health risks such as "long COVID." After Xi's panic-ridden U-turn, the official media backtracked from these arguments and started disseminating misleading claims belittling the negative consequences of the new policy. Despite the government's censorship of COVID-related data, the available evidence shows that Xi's U-turn was a recipe for a public health disaster. Although Chinese official statistics claimed that the country had only 85,000 COVID-19 deaths as of February 2023,[147] the available evidence shows that the actual death toll was much higher. Satellite images showed that crematories were overcrowded across the country during the weeks following the U-turn.[148] In July 2023, the Zhejiang provincial government reported that the number of cremations increased by 73% during the first quarter of the year. This report, which attracted significant public attention, demolished the credibility of the central government's claim that the end of "zero COVID" was an orderly process that did not harm public health. The Zhejiang government soon retracted the report.[149]

147 James Glanz, Mara Hvistendahl, and Agnes Chang, "How Deadly Was China's Covid Wave?," February 15, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/02/15/world/asia/china-covid-death-estimates.html (accessed August 27, 2023).
148 Sophie Jeong and Wayne Chang, "Satellite images capture crowding at China's crematoriums and funeral homes as Covid surge continues," January 11, 2023, https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/10/asia/china-funeral-homes-imagery-covid-intl/index.html (accessed August 27, 2023).
149 Ryan McMorrow and Nian Liu, "China deletes Covid-19 death data," July 18, 2023, https://

According to a recent study, "an estimated 1.87 million excess deaths occurred among individuals 30 years and older" during the first two months after the end of the "zero COVID" policy.[150]

A closer look at the November 2022 unrest wave yields several noteworthy conclusions. First, despite the persistence of the Han majority's chauvinistic prejudices towards Uyghurs, the fact that an injustice suffered by Uyghurs has led to nationwide protests is a significant development. This situation indicates that overcoming the distrust between the two nations might be possible within the process of struggle in the long term. Secondly, similar to the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, the demonstrations in November 2022 involved people from various social classes and political orientations. Notably, individuals with both liberal and socialist tendencies are participating in the protests. Mao posters were displayed during the demonstrations in Shanghai. Just like in Tiananmen 1989,[151] the International anthem was sung during the demonstrations in Shanghai, Peking University, and Chengdu.[152] In a protest held nearby the Liangma Bridge in Beijing, when someone mentioned "external forces," another person in the crowd responded, "Are you referring to external forces like Marx and Engels? Did foreign forces also cause the fire in Xinjiang?"[153]

Finally, and more importantly, demonstrations in November 2022 revealed that Xi's decade-long efforts to build and solidify his dictatorship, which he eagerly sought to confirm as an absolute victory since the 20th Congress, lack a strong enough social foundation. Xi's abrupt U-turn from "zero COVID" right after the mass demonstrations exposed the fragility of his rule.

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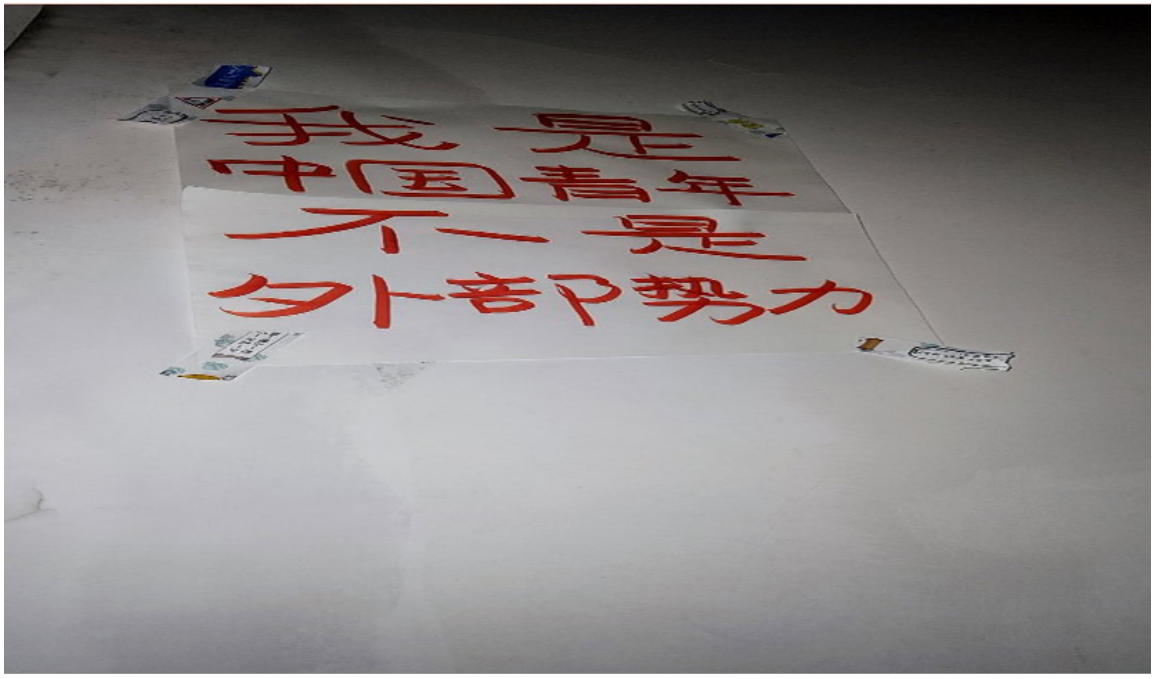
on.ft.com/44srNyb (accessed August 27, 2023).

150 Hong Xiao, Zhicheng Wang, Fang Liu, and Joseph M. Unger, "Excess All-Cause Mortality in China After Ending the Zero COVID Policy," *JAMA Network Open*, vol: 6, no: 8, 2023, doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.30877.

151https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-03/chinese-protesters-sing-the-communist-anthem/11167590 (accessed November 28, 2022).

152 https://twitter.com/Gohahwei1/status/1596862131433254912 (accessed November 28, 2022), https://twitter.com/EliDFriedman/status/1596612696107286528 (accessed November 28, 2022), https://twitter.com/EliDFriedman/status/1596900050747019264 (accessed November 28, 2022).

153 https://twitter.com/renminwansui5/status/1597081723887824896 (accessed November 28, 2022).



The banner at the Ningbo Institute of Technology says: "I am a young Chinese, not an external force."

When considering the unrest wave of November 2022 along with Lao Xie's observations mentioned above, it becomes evident that China remains one of the critical fronts of the world revolution as in the past century. A new Chinese Revolution can help trigger a new wave of world revolution. Building a new revolutionary party in China and a new international worldwide is necessary to initiate this wave. One of the prerequisites for such a direction is to rely on the strength of the working class instead of seeking alliances within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Rejecting Han chauvinism is the only way to transform the Uyghurs, Tibetans, and other oppressed nations into allies of the revolution rather than pawns of reactionary forces. Finally, understanding the non-imperialist, semi-peripheral nature of Chinese capitalism and taking an unequivocal stance against the pro-imperialist, left-liberal "Orange Revolution" camp within China and the rest of the world are essential conditions for revolutionary politics.

March 2024 Municipal Elections from a Class Politics Perspective[1]

Levent Dölek

The March 31 local elections (2024) resulted in a major defeat for the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP). The metropolitan municipalities held by AKP decreased from 15 to 12 from 2019 to 2024. The total loss in municipalities (35 percent loss, from 776 to 507) was much higher. In this election, AKP votes fell to the historic lowest point of 32.42 percent. In contrast, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) looks triumphant. The main criterion of this victory is again in the mayoralties won. CHP increased the metropolitan cities it won from 2019 to 2024 from 11 to 14; in total, the number of CHP's municipalities increased from 263 to 420. CHP achieved first-party status in terms of vote share, receiving 34.47 percent of the votes. The dominant color on the map of Turkey reflecting the election results, became red, which historically represents CHP.

1 This article was previously published in Turkish in the 57th issue of *Devrimci Marksizm* journal (Summer 2024). For its yearly English edition, *Revolutionary Marxism*, certain sections have been cut or summarized, some explanations have been added for readers who are not familiar with the politics of Turkey, some political developments over the past period have been discussed, and the conclusion has been updated and rewritten accordingly.