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INSIGHT

The future begins

Robert Lawrence Kuhn says sixth plenary session will confirm Xi Jinping's vision for China

The sixth plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party, according to the official language, "comprehensively reviews the major achievements made and the historical experience accumulated during the Party's 100 years of struggle".

As the party sees it, the sixth plenum stands at a "new historical starting point" of the "second centenary goal" – to transform China into a fully modernised, socialist nation by the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic of China in 2049 – and in this context, the sixth plenum can be said to be motivated by three "deep understandings": historical context, learning the present to shed light on the future, and serving and satisfying the people.

The plenum holds up the banner, in the party's argot, of socialism with Chinese characteristics, which requires strengthening the four consciousnesses, fortifying the four matters of confidence, and achieving the two safeguards, thus ensuring that the whole party moves forward in unison.

In the run-up to the plenum, the party's general secretary, Xi Jinping, has been praised for "the magnificence, vision, and grand strategy of a Marxist statesman" and lauded for his "extraordinary strategic determination, superb strategic thinking and scientific strategic decision-making".

It comes as no surprise that to many foreigners, the language sounds turgid, repetitive, obsequious, opaque – party-speak of little consequence. To China watchers, the semiotics is blazing: the language consolidates and strengthens the leadership of the party in general and of Xi specifically.

However, notwithstanding the plethora of commentary, few see the sixth plenum

for what it really is: one link, albeit a critical link, in a long chain of interconnected political events that culminate in the formal recognition of China's "new era", led by the party and with Xi as the core of the party's Central Committee and of the whole party. Only a leader with overwhelming authority can reinterpret party history.

To appreciate the deep message of the sixth plenum, we look to party history. There have been only two prior "resolutions on history". In 1945, the first resolution ensured Mao Zedong's firm control as absolute leader. In 1981, the second resolution consolidated support for Deng Xiaoping and his reform and opening-up policy.



The emphasis now is on appreciating the achievements of the past, formulating the goals for the future

From the party's perspective, both of these prior resolutions unified thinking and gathered strength to complete new historical tasks, which is exactly what the party expects from the sixth plenum under Xi.

But both prior resolutions also involved blunt critiques of contentious problems: for Mao, overcoming severe inner-party politics to attain sole leadership; for Deng, resolving divisive inner-party issues from the chaotic Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Both previous resolutions consoli-

dated the party under its core leader, quashed dissenting views, and opened a "new era". In Mao's era, China "stood up". In Deng's era, China "became rich".

Now, for the party's third resolution on history, the parallels are striking: consolidating the party under its core leader to commence a third "new era". In Xi's era, China "becomes strong".

However, there are differences between the first two and this third resolution, in that there is now no overt need to resolve past disputes, no lingering negative issues to clean up. The emphasis now is on appreciating the achievements of the past, formulating the goals for the future, and setting forth the policies to bring it all about.

Here, I would like to describe the chain of events beginning with the party's 18th National Congress in late 2012, when Xi became senior leader, and which led up to and will stretch beyond the sixth plenum.

The first link of the chain was Xi's innovative ideological, strategic and policy initiatives in the early years of his leadership, from 2012 to 2015: the dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation; the "Four Comprehensives" (moderately prosperous society, reform, rule of law, strict governance of the party); the relentless anti-corruption campaign; the new development concepts (innovation, coordination, green, open, sharing); the targeted poverty alleviation campaign; the reform and strengthening of the military; the modernisation of the national governance system; the Belt and Road Initiative of building infrastructure in developing countries; the global call for "a community with a shared future for humanity"; and the Sinitisation of Marxism, among others.

The second link, in late 2016, in recog-

nition of the breadth, depth and speed of Xi's accomplishments, was designating Xi as "core" of the party's Central Committee and of the whole party, which was perhaps the axial move to increase Xi's authority and responsibility above all others.

The third link, in late 2017, at the party's 19th National Congress, was incorporating "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" into the party's constitution. This was momentous. Given that Marxism is the ideological foundation of the party, and the party leads the country, now that Xi is the official ideological arbiter of contemporary Marxism, by simple deductive logic, therefore Xi leads both party and country.

The fourth link of the chain, in early 2018, was the removal of term limits for China's presidency. There were never term limits for general secretary of the Communist Party and chairman of the Central Military Commission.

Now, in 2021, comes the fifth link, the sixth plenum confirming the commencement of the new era with Xi as the core of the party and at the helm of the country – and as only the third Chinese leader, preceded by Mao and Deng, to open a new era. This plenum will set the stage for the sixth and final link of the chain spanning the full 10 years of Xi's two terms.

The sixth link, in late 2022, will be the party's 20th National Congress, which will present the grand vision and articulate specific objectives for the years 2035 and 2049/50, towards the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, with Xi, with an almost certain third term, unequivocally and unsurpassably in charge.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn, a public intellectual and international corporate strategist, won the China Reform Friendship Medal (2018). Adam Zhu also contributed to this article

Partial border reopening a very timely gift

Ken Chu says the possibility of even limited travel to the mainland is great news for struggling Hong Kong businesses and for residents who have been unable to visit family for so long

Hong Kong has been in talks with the central government in an attempt to fully open the border with the mainland, which has been practically closed by strict mandatory quarantine measures since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Only limited groups of people have been able to enter Hong Kong. These included, until November 12, senior financial executives, whose presence was deemed to be in the interests of Hong Kong's economy, as well as Hong Kong and non-Hong Kong residents eligible for the Return2HK and Come2HK travel schemes respectively.

This has caused tremendous stress among members of the business community and local residents who have businesses or family ties on the mainland.

If you are an ordinary salaried worker, you could potentially risk losing your job if you have to undergo a lengthy quarantine period both on entering the mainland and returning to Hong Kong because you want to visit your family across the border. Now, there seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel.

The State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office has reportedly expressed optimism about reopening the border. A spokesman was recently quoted as saying that "both sides [China and Hong Kong] met each other halfway and the full reopening of the border is progressing in an orderly manner".

Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor has also said the reopening could be gradual. However, according to local media reports, while there will be quarantine-free travel, it will initially be limited to between Hong Kong and Guangdong, with Shenzhen serving as the key border point.

There have been reports that such quarantine-free travel could start as early as mid-December, with the mainland reopening fully to quarantine-free travel by June at the latest. That would be a great Christmas gift for Hong Kong and would provide a much-needed boost to the local economy.

Although the initial phase would only cover travel to Guangdong, this would still be a huge relief to many of the more than 550,000 Hong Kong residents who usually live in the mainland province, according to Census and Statistics Department data.



With all systems in place, a gradual approach is the best way to ensure a smooth full border reopening

Lam has also mentioned that Hong Kong residents entering the mainland would most likely have to use a contact-tracing app or health code. This has been described as a critical requirement set by mainland authorities for permitting quarantine-free border travel on both sides.

That should be feasible. There are unlikely to be drastic technical modifications needed to align our home-grown "Leave Home Safe" contact-tracing app with the mainland's health code system. However, there are still several concerns for the government to address.

Privacy issues aside, officials should consider the practical technological challenges faced by elderly people if using a smartphone and an app is the only way to satisfy the mainland's health coding requirements.

On the mainland, elderly citizens often have the option of going through special assistance lanes where their ID cards can be scanned for health code information. Perhaps a similar mechanism can be extended to retired people who live in Guangdong but have family ties in Hong Kong. Otherwise, they might not benefit from the border reopening.

The governments on both sides of the border have made great strides in controlling the pandemic, in the face of highly contagious Covid-19 variants.

With all systems in place, a gradual approach is the best way to ensure a smooth full border reopening, which will be great news for people's lives and livelihoods.

Let's keep our fingers crossed.

Ken Chu is group chairman and CEO of Mission Hills Group and a national committee member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference



There have been reports that quarantine-free travel could start as early as mid-December. Photo: Sam Tsang



Australia's climate deal refusal a matter of politics

Kalinga Seneviratne says Prime Minister Scott Morrison is putting domestic considerations first

In his address to the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow last week, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison argued that technology is the solution to tackling climate change and refused to sign up to agreements limiting methane gas emissions and stopping investments in new coal plants.

"Technology will have the answers to a decarbonised economy, particularly over time," he said. "Driving down the cost of technology and enabling it to be adopted at scale is at the core of the Australian way to reach our target of net zero emissions by 2050 that we are committing to at this COP26."

His plan was described by Labor Party opposition leader Anthony Albanese as a "scam" that "doesn't constitute a plan". Australian Greens leader Adam Bandt described the 2050 plan as a "climate fraud" with no details on how to achieve it.

With a federal election due in the new year, Morrison's refusal to join the two agreements and championing Australian green technology investments are designed to appeal to the local electorate.

The methane gas agreement is unpopular with rural farming communities, and with a major coal plant just opening in rural Queensland, with promises of thousands of new jobs, it is a vote-catcher with these communities. Pro-environmental policies are popular mainly with urban voters who usually vote with Labor or the Greens.

At the last federal election, in May 2019,

Morrison's Liberal-National Party (LNP) coalition narrowly won thanks mainly to a large number of seats in rural Queensland. That swing to the LNP could be a factor in next year's elections as well.

Labor knows this. While Albanese slammed Morrison's plan, he also didn't criticise his decision not to join the coal agreement.

As Asian economies recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, the Australian government's Resources and Energy Quarterly estimates that the value of Australian coal exports will rise to \$24 billion (HK\$138 billion) in 2021-22.

In June, the multibillion-dollar Carmichael mine in Queensland's Galilee Basin, operated by India's Adani Group, struck coal for the first time. It is expected to start operations soon to export coal to India. The company is completing a railway line almost 200km long to connect the mine to two ports, and it is expected to produce 10 million tonnes of coal a year for export with a lifespan of 60 years. The project should create thousands of new jobs in Queensland once it is fully operational.

Australia's refusal to join the European Union and the US in pledging to commit to reduce global methane gas emissions by 30 per cent from 2020 levels by 2030, which could significantly reduce global warming, also stems from domestic political concerns.

Rural farmers are the backbone of Australia's meat industry, and both cattle

and sheep grazing contribute heavily to methane emissions. These farming areas are prime vote banks of Morrison's coalition partner, the National Party of Australia. Its leader, and deputy prime minister, Barnaby Joyce, said the only way to meet the targets in the methane pledge would be "to start shooting your cattle".



Farming areas are prime vote banks of Morrison's coalition partner, the National Party of Australia

Australia's red meat and livestock industry makes a large contribution to the country's economy. The industry contributed \$17.6 billion to Australia's GDP in 2018-19, and as of June 2019, 24.7 million grain-fed cattle and 65.8 million sheep were raised in Australia, according to statistics from industry group Meat and Livestock Australia.

Australia's new green technology plan is based on a set of several projections. According to a vision statement released by the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources, Australia will be able to produce clean hydrogen for less

than \$2 per kilogram, low-emission steel production for less than \$900 per tonne, low-emission aluminium at less than \$2,700 per tonne and electricity from storage for firing for less than \$100 per megawatt-hour within the next few years.

Thus, Australia has presented itself as a technological saviour to a warming world, something to which it is no stranger after suffering several devastating bush fires recently.

Some could see Australia's actions as yet another selfish attempt by a rich country to avoid making sacrifices but, instead, to buy time to profit from new technologies that could be sold to the rest of the world at a price, as pharmaceutical companies have done with Covid-19 vaccines.

Morrison has hinted at a technology marketing strategy. Australia is expected to invest upwards of \$20 billion in the coming decade to drive the transition to green technology by leveraging private-sector investment.

The Australian stall at COP26 was dominated by an exhibit of a model of a carbon-capture plant by oil and gas giant Santos, which is expected to receive carbon credit revenue from taxpayers. This angered Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, who said the Australian government "is more interested in keeping the fossil fuel companies happy rather than working with other world leaders to increase climate action".

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