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The Third Plenum of the Communist Party Leaders

The Third Plenum of the Communist Party of China since Xi Jinping took over has approved three key changes in the areas of the one-child policy, national security and economic reform.

The meeting began November 9th and ended November 12th in Beijing. Two new key mechanisms would be set up to co-ordinate national security and economic reforms, the press release said.

The final statement adopted by about 400 senior party members of the ruling Chinese Communist Party calls for the creation of a state security committee made up of high-ranking party officials that would operate as a national security agency to co-ordinate policy-making in foreign relations and military.

The same statement also called for a "deep reform leadership group" to restructure the economy to handle its weaknesses.

Communist leaders are also expected to approve significant changes to the country's one-child rule, Caixin Magazine reported citing party sources. Under the new rules, couples would be allowed to have a second child if either parent is an only child.

Population issues are very sensitive in China, where an aging population and a falling birth due to brutal state policies are leading to the collapse of the pension, health and welfare systems.

[Beijing AsiaNews]



China One-Child Policy, A Relaxing Photo.



Xi Jinping's Third Plenum Reform Plan Launched China on the Road toward this Dream.

China loosens policies

China will ease its family planning policies and abolish a controversial labor camp system, according to a key document issued after a ruling Communist Party meeting.

Couples will be allowed to have two children if one of the parents is an only child, as part of an adjustment of the birth policy to promote "long-term balanced development of the population in China." Previously, a couple could only generally have a second child if both parents were only children.

The reform package will also see China abolish the labor camp system, which it calls re-education through labor, and reduce the number of crimes subject to the death penalty "step by step."

[South China Morning Post]

Church News

For the Church this Detail Could Well Be the Devil

A 92-minute documentary, produced by the National Defense University, was leaked onto the internet. It was later removed. The documentary, Silent Contest, expresses the views of some powerful groups and individuals in China. It describes the threats posed by "foreign powers" such as the United States of America, seeking to infiltrate China.

The film lists external infiltration in five categories: political, cultural, public opinion and ideology, organizational and social. It also claims that the Western world has launched secret missionary activities in China and introduced Western belief systems to Chinese society with a clear objective of Western religious infiltration.

Among the five recognized religions in China, party officials are more at ease with Chinese Buddhism and Taoism (which are believed to be usually peaceful) than with Christianity. In late September, Reuters news agency quoted what it called sources close to President, Xi Jinping, as saying that he hoped traditional faiths would fill a moral void in China. The report added that President Xi was referring to Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. As for the other three religions, Tibetan Buddhism and Islam are linked to territorial interests in Tibet and Xinjiang. In the documentary, Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, is seen as a foreign religion, which arouses the suspicions of party officials.

Pope Francis and Chinese President Xi Jinping were elected less than 24 hours apart last March. Some Catholic observers and scholars expressed the belief that it was time for both sides to put aside historic conflicts and turn a new page. Pope Francis appointed Archbishop Pietro Parolin as his Secretary of State in August. Some commentators believed the Holy See would revert to the China policy it had held before 2009 when Parolin was chief negotiator with the People's Republic.

But now, after this Third Plenum, any optimism about a warming of relations between China and the Vatican – especially as there has been no noticeable improvement in the trust between the two sides - would seem to be premature.



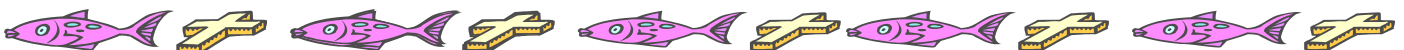
The Film "Silent Contest" was Removed from YouTube

Meanwhile, the fortunes of the local Church have not improved. While there has not been a recurrence of ordinations of bishops without Vatican approval, the harassment of clergy continues.

In August, four priests belonging to the unofficial community, who had no registration papers as clergy, were detained in Hebei and their whereabouts are still unknown. In October, in Handan, a different part of Hebei, priests from both the official and unofficial communities were placed under house arrest and taken away for re-education sessions, after they participated in a ceremony of a priest's ordination as a bishop, which was arranged privately at an undisclosed time and location, to avoid a bishop who does not have Vatican approval attending the ceremony.

The stakes are high, yet the life of the Catholic Church in China will be a subset of developments on the larger canvas of China's direction. The fear is that China could slip back into the paranoid of its Middle Kingdom politics that have been evident throughout Chinese history, most recently, during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. To avoid this, an approach other than that outlined at the Third Plenum is needed.

[UCA News, Hong Kong]



A Chinese Bishop Laments

"The liturgy (in China) has been abused, especially with illegitimate bishops being present at ordination ceremonies," John Cardinal Tong Hon said during a meeting of the Asian Liturgy Forum which was hosted by Hong Kong diocese from October 21 to 24.

Speaking at a plenary session on October 23 in the Diocese Centre, Cardinal Tong said that although China has not seen an illicit ordination of a bishop in over 18 months, as recently as the ordination of Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin in Shanghai last year, illegitimate bishops concelebrated at the ordination Mass and at other times have even taken part in the laying on of hands ritual.

"The sacredness of the liturgy has been ignored and the liturgy has been abused, especially with illegitimate bishops present, it has become a political football and manipulated for political reasons," Cardinal Tong said, speaking with strong feeling and emotion.

He said that he hopes with Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang in power that a different atmosphere will emerge in China, one which will allow the Church more freedom to be itself and make its own decisions without interference from the authorities. He said that he still has hope that this will eventuate in the not too distant future.

[Hong Kong Sunday Examiner]



Cardinal Tong, Bishop of Hong Kong

Bishop Ma Makes Public Appearance

It has emerged that Auxiliary Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin of Shanghai made a brief appearance at a former colleague's memorial service. The young prelate has been largely confined to Sheshan Seminary in the suburbs of Shanghai since July 2012, when he dramatically declared his resignation from the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association during his ordination as bishop.

The former colleague was Shen Baoyi, who died on Oct 20 at the age of 90. He was editor-in-chief of Guangqi Press, the first Catholic publishing house to be opened in China after religious activities were revived in the late 1970s. Upon his retirement in 1998, he was succeeded by then Father Ma.

During the memorial service, held at Longhua Funeral Parlor in Shanghai on Oct 24, Bishop Ma paid tribute to Shen and blessed his body. After offering his condolences to Shen's family, he then left quietly.

His confinement to the seminary, apparently ordered by the state, appears to have been slightly relaxed in recent months. In July, accompanied by local government officials he visited Jinggangshan, the birthplace of China's former Red Army and cradle of its revolution.

This was a "symbolic gesture" to show remorse to the Chinese authorities, an anonymous source told ucanews.com. However, the source added that "it is still too early to say that Bishop Ma has regained his freedom and could return to normal episcopal ministry soon."

[UCA News]

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Religious Issues

Xi Jinping Calls on Religions to Help Fight Corruption

Unbridled economic development and materialism has undermined the moral standards of Chinese society, especially in the Communist Party. The president and secretary general plan on giving more freedom to Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism to restore morality to the tired Chinese society. But Prof. *Liu Peng* believes it beneficial to launch **a real law for the freedom of all religions**, including Christianity and Islam.

In one of my first trips to China over 20 years ago, an old woman who used to clean a church in Guangdong, called for greater religious freedom. "Why does the government not give more freedom to our faith? After all, what does the Christian faith advise? 'Honor your father and your mother, do not kill, do not steal ... Are these not good things for society?'"

The poor old woman was grieved because several unofficial bishops had been arrested, but also because the corruption of the members of the Party and the Patriotic Association were increasingly evident. And she stressed the commandment of "thou shalt not steal" right in front of a government official, famous for receiving bribes.

Several decades after that episode, corruption in the Party and the government has become a real disease. According to the Supreme Court, which each year publishes a report of its work, from 2008 to 2012 at least 143 thousand government officials were convicted of corruption, with an average of 78 a day!

Corruption has become so debilitating that every Party president and secretary has appealed for a conversion to honesty, warning that if there is no change, the Party will self destruct. Xi Jinping, last November, on becoming general secretary, shouted that "the worst corruption will only result in the end of the Party and state! We have to be vigilant".

At present Xi has launched yet another campaign of "zero tolerance" against members of the party that stand apart "from the masses" and slip into illegality re-launching Mao era sessions of self-criticism.

Lately, to heal China of corruption, Xi Jinping appears to be seeking help from religions. Convinced that immorality has spread because of a too hasty and material development without spiritual reference, he has reportedly confided that there is a need to be "more tolerant" of traditional religions. In this way he hopes that "the cultural traditions of China, Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, will help fill the void that has allowed corruption to emerge."

However, there are two main objections to Xi Jinping considerations. The first is that for a long time the Party has significantly subsidized Confucian and Buddhist activities, but has not seen any improvement in corruption levels.

In 2002, Beijing allocated as many as 10 billion U.S. dollars to finance the revival of Confucius, the ancient Chinese sage. But there appears to have been few beneficial effects. The same can be said with the great support given to Buddhism (excluding Tibet).

The second objection is that the emphasis on "traditional religions" makes no discrimination on the faithful: they do not understand why Buddhism, which entered China from India only a few centuries before Christianity and Islam, should be considered "traditional" compared to the others.

Either way, the link that the Party leader makes between morality and religion is to be appreciated. The Chinese Communist Party should not control religions, but let them penetrate the Chinese society to restore consistency, morality, cohesion, ideals within and beyond history.

For this to happen China needs to adopt a law on religion (not a regulation). This would solve the problems that the state has with other religions through the law and allow the state to take advantage of the benevolent influence of religion on society.

This would be beneficial not only in fighting corruption, but also in enhancing social harmony and raising ideals. Perhaps it is time for Xi Jinping to listen to the warning of the old woman from Guangdong.

[AsiaNews]

Social Issues

UN Criticizes China's Rights Record

The UN human rights council has criticized China during an official review of its human rights record. Many members of the council expressed concern at the arrest of dissidents, the continued use of the death penalty and the use of torture in prison.

But Chinese officials said major progress had been made in improving social and economic rights. They said people had better access to healthcare and education, and incomes had risen across the country.

Ahead of proceedings on Oct 22nd, at least three Tibet activists scaled scaffolding at the UN headquarters in Geneva, with a banner saying: "China human rights - UN stand up on Tibet".

A Chinese government white paper released said that Beijing had no intention of altering its "correct" policies in Tibet as they had brought "unprecedented achievements".

Members of the UN panel also expressed concern about the treatment of a number of Chinese human rights activists in recent weeks. A BBC correspondent says several have been arrested or banned from travelling in a bid to prevent them from testifying in Geneva.

On Monday, a wealthy Chinese businessman, Wang Gongquan, was formally arrested on suspicion of "gathering crowds to disturb public order". Mr Wang is considered a key supporter of a group of activists pushing for more official transparency, New Citizens Movement, which has been targeted in a crackdown this year.

Human Rights Watch has also expressed concern about a well-known legal rights activist who recently disappeared after being questioned by Beijing airport police. The group says Cao Shunli has not been seen since 14 September, when she was barred from boarding a flight to Switzerland to attend a UN human rights training course.

A number of bloggers and journalists have also been detained over alleged "rumour-mongering", and high-profile micro-bloggers targeted.

[BBC News China]

13 Million Abortions Every Year

New data published by China's National Health and Family Planning Commission indicates that there are more than 13 million abortions conducted in the country every year, highlighting the huge reliance on the procedure as it seeks to restrain population growth.

The rate of abortions, at roughly 1 in 100 people, is well above global averages. The U.S., by comparison, reported just 780,000 abortions in 2009, according to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or a rate of 1 in 500 people.

The Chinese statistics only account for surgical procedures conducted at licensed hospitals and clinics, and don't take account medically for induced abortions or procedures conducted at the unlicensed clinics seen in poorer parts of the country.

The data appears to show that it is predominantly younger people who are choosing to have abortions. And while China's restrictive one-child policy is certainly one factor influencing the high rate of terminations, lack of awareness about sexual safety seems to be another important contributor.

Almost half of the reported procedures were conducted on women below the age of 25, the majority of whom were university students. Recent surveys have shown a surprising lack of awareness about basic sexual health among China's youth.

A survey published by the China World Contraception Day Organization showed that more than 68% of Chinese women were confused about the difference between oral contraceptives and the morning-after pill. Just 1.2% of Chinese women take oral contraceptives, compared with 30% to 50% of women in some developed countries.

[Time Magazine]



Party's Third Plenum Promises Economic Change

Communist Party leaders pledged to give market competition a "decisive role" in the economy and strengthen judicial independence on November 11th. The communiqué issued at the end of a four-day party conclave laid down broad policy directions, but contained few particulars. The only concrete move was to set up two powerful organs - one to spearhead reforms and another to formulate a co-ordinated national security strategy.

The main objective of the key policy meeting, called the third plenum, was to forge consensus among the party elite and set a general tone for the country's development. The plenum was attended by 204 full members of the Communist Party Central Committee and 169 alternates.

The communiqué, the first policy blueprint unveiled by the new leadership under President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang, struck a bold tone on economic reform, but a conservative one on the political front.

The leaders pledged to strengthen the independence of the judiciary and improve the anti-corruption mechanism. But these measures are aimed at shoring up the legitimacy and control of the ruling party. No Western-style political reform ideas were mentioned. The stress is still on developing the economy, which the leadership believes to be the key to the problems facing China.

Already the second-largest world economy, the country is struggling with unprecedented challenges, such as a slowdown in growth, a widening gap in pay, widespread social injustice and rampant corruption. "The focus of the restructuring of the economic system... is to allow the market [forces] to play a 'decisive role' in the allocation of resources," the communiqué said.

For the first time, the Party also said the private sector should be treated on the same footing as state-owned enterprises. It said: "Both the public and private sectors are the same important components of a socialist market economy and the important bases of our nation's economic and social development."

The Party decided to set up a powerful agency to steer the reform crusade. "The central leading group on comprehensively deepening reforms will be responsible for the overall reform design ... and the implementation of reform policies," it said. On other fronts, the party vowed to "promote the rule of law and respect for the constitution", which will be crucial for a market-oriented economic system to flourish.

Some analysts questioned whether the initiatives could work without introducing equally significant political change. "My view is that without substantial effort toward political liberalization, the market economic reform could hardly succeed," said Zhang Ming, a political scientist at Renmin University. The leadership also announced the formation of a state security committee "to perfect the state security system and state security strategy, and to ensure national security".

Highlights of the third plenum

1. Achieve "decisive accomplishments" in major fields, build a sound, scientific and effective institutional system in all sectors by 2020.
2. Economic reform is the key to comprehensive reforms. Streamline the relationship between government and the market. The latter will play a "decisive role" in allocating resources.
3. Safeguard the authority of the constitution and law. Deepen law enforcement reform, guarantee the independent use of authority by the judiciary and prosecutors in accordance with the law; improve protection of human rights within the judicial system.
4. Establish open and transparent market rules; let the market play a major role in pricing. Establish a unified market for construction land in cities and the countryside; improve the financial system; deepen reform of science and technology sectors.
5. Set up a national security committee.

[South China Morning Post]



Political and Economic Reforms

A fascinating conundrum embroiled the top leaders of China's Communist Party in response to the protests that escalated on Tiananmen Square in the summer of 1989. Could the country's nascent free-market reform succeed without matching political freedom? Deng Xiaoping, the grandfather of Chinese reform, argued that political opening would undermine the economic progress China had made.

And still today, nearly a quarter century later, the decision taken by Deng in 1989 effectively holds. However, the more the Chinese economy advances, the more the needed reforms undercut the party's ability to control the nation. Here, then, we find the central challenge to the future of China's economy: Will the Communist Party be willing to implement reforms that force its own power to recede?

That question sits at the heart of China's most recent slate of pledged reforms. A party plenum in early November promised a wide range of bold reforms, from an easing of the controversial one-child policy to the dismantling of some state monopolies. Many of the reforms are targeted directly at what many economists believe the economy needs most urgently, strengthening the financial sector, liberalizing prices and interest rates and improving the management of state-owned enterprises.

On the other hand, China's leaders are much more into big-bang announcements than big-bang reform, and the roll-out of many of these new policies is expected to be slow. Officials have indicated that even the long-overdue change of the one-child policy is not going to be rushed. Perhaps most importantly, the promise of a more liberal, market-oriented economy came paired with signs that President Xi Jinping may be tightening the party's grip on the Internet and free expression. Xi is also setting up a new national security superagency that some analysts see as a method of further centralizing power.

So it appears that Xi is holding fast to the Deng approach, liberalizing the economy while keeping politics in lock down. Perhaps he can strengthen and advance the economy while maintaining the political status quo. Or perhaps his reforms will fail because of an unwillingness to cede political authority to economic need. Which way this critical question turns will likely determine the future of China.

[Time Magazine]

China Opens UN Door to Taiwan

China is giving Taiwan a rare chance to join a United Nations event in September, showing the strength of a new relationship that was once considered impossible due to decades of hostilities between the two political and military rivals.

China, backed by about 170 diplomatic allies, normally bars Taiwan from any role in international agencies that require statehood of its members. Although China has regarded Taiwan as part of its territory, it is softening its tone by allowing Taiwan special guest status at a UN aviation agency's general assembly in Montreal.

The International Civil Aviation Organization's special pass to Taiwan follows a positive cue last year from former Chinese president Hu Jintao during an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting, Taiwan's foreign ministry says.

Taiwan wants a bigger UN role as it faces pressure at home to assert itself more internationally following the 1971 loss of its UN seat when the global body recognized China. Since 2009, it has pushed China and other powerful countries to let it participate in the aviation agency as a way of keeping up on air safety and security issues.

"This was not a very easy relaxation of Beijing's blockade," says Alexander Huang, a professor of strategic studies at Tamkang University in Taiwan. "This is long awaited goodwill from China. We pushed very hard both through bilateral channels and third parties."

The nod from Mr. Hu followed nearly five years of talks on trade and investment that have built an unprecedented trust between China and Taiwan. China had threatened to use force against the island just 100 miles away as recently as 2005 and there was virtually no diplomacy until Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou took office in 2008.

[UCA News]



Reading Notes



- China's Nonprofit Sector: Progress and Challenges
Chien-Chung Huang, Guosheng Deng, Zhenyao Wang and Richard L. Edwards.
Transaction Publishers (October 1, 2013) 257 pp.

The publication of China's Nonprofit Sector opens a window for the reader to view and understand the historical development, evolution, and roles that the nonprofit sector plays in China today. The book provides an excellent framework for understanding the types and kinds of nonprofit organizations, including foundations, publicly affiliated nonprofit organizations, and fully private nonprofits. Finally, this book will also assist the reader in understanding the status of nonprofits in China today, the significant progress and potential in their development and contribution to Chinese society, and the challenges such organizations will face in the future.

- Church Militant: Bishop Kung and Catholic Resistance in Communist Shanghai
Paul P. Mariani. Harvard University Press, October 24, 2011. 310pp.

A gripping narrative of how militant Catholics in Shanghai in the 1950s tried to resist the Communist Party and how the Party crushed them. The book contains interesting material, based on internal party documents, on the tactics used by the Communists to organize multifaceted campaigns against the church, to infiltrate Catholic organizations, and to divide Catholics from one another.

Historian Paul Mariani tells the story of how Bishop (later Cardinal) Ignatius Kung Pinmei, the Jesuits, and the Catholic Youth resisted the regime's punishing assault on the Shanghai Catholic community and refused to renounce the pope and the Church in Rome. Acting clandestinely, mirroring tactics used by the previously underground CCP, Shanghai's Catholics persevered until 1955, when the party arrested Kung and 1,200 other leading Catholics. The imprisoned believers were later shocked to learn that the betrayal had come from within their own ranks.



2014



The Chinese visiting scholars participated in the celebrations of Chinese New Year 2014 at our Berkeley office.