

Analysis: Xi Jinping's plan to rule for life is coming together

Third historical resolution and 2035 'common prosperity' target outline path forward

Katsuji Nakazawa, Nikkei senior staff writer

TOKYO -- In the span of a few days, two key developments have unfolded in China, both directly connected to the bid by Xi Jinping, the country's president and the party's general secretary, to become leader for life.

One is what is called the "third historical resolution," whose content will be made public next month. The other is the emergence of a timetable for Xi's new political goal of "common prosperity."

"As German philosophers Georg Hegel and Karl Marx said, history repeats itself," said a Chinese Communist Party source familiar with the party's internal affairs, referring to the third resolution. "There is no doubt that President Xi is aiming to become leader for life, emulating the two figures who issued the first and second resolutions."

The source was referring to Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, both of whom wielded power until the day they died.

"The other side of the coin is the great political goal of common prosperity," the source said, "which will be pursued carefully over the next 10 or 15 years."

The party's Politburo on Monday decided to hold a key political meeting from Nov. 8 to Nov. 11. The sixth plenary session of the party's 19th Central Committee will deliberate on and adopt a "key resolution on the major achievements and historical experience of the Party's 100 years of endeavors," the Politburo said. This points to the third historical resolution.

The party has adopted a resolution on history twice in the past, first in 1945 and again in 1981.

The first document, which came four years before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, was drafted under Mao Zedong.

The second was written under Deng Xiaoping, the father of the "reform and opening-up" policy. It denounces the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution under Mao but recognizes some of the leader's achievements.

The third resolution on history has a weighty meaning. To put it simply, the new document indicates the possibility of Xi becoming the third great figure in the party's history.

Importantly, Mao and Deng continued to be China's supreme leader until their dying breath. Mao temporarily lost power after serious economic mismanagement but made a comeback through the Cultural Revolution. Deng wielded enormous power even after retiring from official posts -- so much so that he could replace any of his successors with one order.

Xi's role model is Mao, not Deng.

Some party sources have pointed to the fact that after Mao assumed the party's helm at the Zunyi Conference in Guizhou Province in 1935, during the 1934-1936 Long March, he waited for as many as 10 years before issuing the first historical resolution to justify his basic policies, opening the way for him to become a person with absolute power.

Xi may be looking at a similar timeline. He came to power as the party's general secretary in the autumn of 2012, then assumed the post of Chinese president in the spring of 2013. A decade into his leadership, he is now looking to issue a historical resolution, emulating Mao.

As a prelude to the 1945 resolution on history, Mao launched the first Rectification Movement in Yan'an, the party's revolutionary stronghold, in the first half of the 1940s to purge political opponents.

In 1945, the same year as the adoption of the first historical resolution, Mao became party chairman, a newly created post and the party's highest. His status as party chairman remained unchanged until he died in 1976.

In similar fashion to the Rectification Movement, Xi began a fierce anti-corruption campaign after ascending to power, driving out one foe after another.

Xi's anti-corruption campaign is still alive and kicking; the latest takedown of an influential figure came earlier this month.

If the current leader does stay on beyond next year's Communist Party National Congress, then "common prosperity" is set to be the era's defining phrase. The Oct. 16 edition of the Qiushi Journal, the party's theoretical publication, carried an August speech by Xi that outlined this new political goal.

In it, he pledged to ensure substantive progress toward correcting the nation's income inequality, resulting in equal access to basic public services, by 2035. This marked the first time that a timeline for common prosperity was put forth.

What is the significance? Such a grandiose goal cannot be expected to be met by 2027, the end of Xi's expected third term as the party's general secretary, the most powerful position in the country.

Hence the buzz about a fourth term, from 2027 to 2032.

Earlier this year, the party celebrated the 100th anniversary of its establishment, and Xi declared the completion of a "moderately prosperous society," the political goal dating back to the era of Deng Xiaoping.

The new political goal of common prosperity is a successor.

The headquarters of China Evergrande Group in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province. Will Evergrande become a necessary sacrifice in China's pursuit of common prosperity? © Reuters

But what would a common prosperity world look like?

So far, not pretty. Since the phrase emerged, the Chinese economy has suffered a significant downturn as investors fear what political moves await.

Over the past year, several mysterious incidents have taken place in China. They include the postponement of Ant Group's listing, pressure on ride-hailing giant Didi, a ban on tutoring

schools for children of compulsory school age, strict limits on children's online video game playing and the debt crisis of major property developer China Evergrande Group.

The common thread that binds all of these developments is common prosperity.

With the leader's goal set in stone, common prosperity must be realized at any cost. And if problems arise? Those will be treated as necessary sacrifices.

This is just the beginning. Prepare for unprecedented developments as Xi extends his reign.