

REFORMING THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY IN 2016

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Executive Summary

1. The most significant development in party-building in 2016 was arguably the formal designation of Xi Jinping as the “core” (*hexin*) of the Chinese leadership at the Sixth Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) 18th Party Congress. This is widely regarded as critical for his quest to become the new paramount leader of China.
2. However, Xi’s road to core was not smooth. In 2016, Xi repeatedly warned against conspirators aspiring for his position, and urged his Politburo colleagues to respect him as the core and fall in line with him politically.
3. Xi’s vision for China locates the CCP at the centre and a strong leadership at the top. Xi’s party building in 2016 revealed three components: rebuild a healthy human ecology within the Party, beef up intra-party supervision and re-establish ideological faith.
4. The Sixth Plenum adopted two more intra-party regulations, “Several Norms Governing Intra-party Political Life” and “Regulations on Intra-party Supervision”. By reviving the old CCP virtues of sacrifice, service and people-centred work style and clean frugal lifestyle, among others, Xi hopes to rebuild a healthy intra-party human ecology.
5. The new “Supervision” regulation intends to establish a comprehensive system of intra-party supervision by clarifying the division of labour among the various components of the Party and increasing the accountability of decision making.
6. Xi has made re-establishing ideological faith a centrepiece of his party-building programme. The return of ideology has to do with his fear that the CCP may fall apart in the absence of a common faith.

7. However, there is a long way to go before Marxism can be, if at all, successfully adapted to China's new reality. Xi's main measure taken in 2016 was tightening of ideological control.
8. Western ideas are banned, freedom of speech restricted. Cadres deemed wayward or not firm enough on official stand are punished. Liberal publications have been shut down. Some of Mao-style rituals are revived to re-inforce the official discourse. Xi seems determined to have the party speak in one voice.
9. The return of ideology has a restrictive effect on cadres who are used to open-ended reform experiments. Xi needs to assemble a team of his own at the coming 19th Party Congress, a team who understands his vision and is devoted to its implementation, without which his reform programme may lack energy source.
10. Great concerns have been raised on whether Xi's current approach is sustainable. He may have to change tact to move things ahead.