

February 15, 2022

Transformation of Historical Awareness under the Xi Jinping Administration  
—Regarding Negative History, Political Style, and Foreign Policy—

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In November 2021, in the 19th Central Committee's 6th Plenary Session (6th Plenum), the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party adopted the so-called Third Historical Resolution, which is “a resolution on the significant achievements and historical experience of the Party's 100-year struggle.”<sup>i</sup> This paper analyzes how the administration of General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Xi Jinping (the head of state) has transformed historical awareness compared with past administrations regarding (1) the negative history of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and the Tiananmen Square Incident (1989), (2) the political style of concentration of power and cult of personality, and (3) the foreign policy that focused on territorial sovereignty, to explore the direction that Xi Jinping aims for.

◇Xi Jinping Mentioned More Often Than Mao Zedong

This paper uses as materials the Chinese Communist Party History Chronicle of Events published in July 2011 upon the 90th anniversary of the formation of the Communist Party under the administration of Hu Jintao (hereinafter “90th Anniversary Chronicle”)<sup>ii</sup> and Chronicle of the Communist Party of China (hereinafter “100th Anniversary Chronicle”) published in June 2021 under the Xi administration on the 100th anniversary of the party’s formation<sup>iii</sup>. The Third Historical Resolution is, of course, deeply related to the latter, but I hypothesize that Xi Jinping justifies the policy he is trying to develop and sets the future direction through a 100-year historical interpretation of the Communist Party.

The 90th Anniversary Chronicle and the 100th Anniversary Chronicle are both records of important domestic and foreign incidents recorded by era. The former is about 79,000 characters and the latter is about 97,000 characters. Incidentally, the Third Historical Resolution is about 36,000 characters.

The 90th Anniversary Chronicle and the 100th Anniversary Chronicle mention Mao Zedong, respectively, 150 and 138 times, and Deng Xiaoping 83 and 75 times. While there was no great change for the two leaders in a ten-year period, Former General

Secretary Hu Jintao, who was mentioned 60 times in the 90th Anniversary Chronicle, was mentioned only 32 times in the 100th Anniversary Chronicle. Xi Jinping was mentioned 184 times in his 100th Anniversary Chronicle, surpassing Mao Zedong.

On the other hand, in the Third Historical Resolution, Xi Jinping was mentioned 22 times compared with Mao Zedong's 18 mentions and Deng Xiaoping's 6 mentions. The historical emphasis on Xi Jinping's achievements in just nine years after seizing power is common to both the 100th Anniversary Chronicle and the Third Historical Resolution.

#### ◇ Changes in Evaluation of the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square Incident

In the history of the Chinese Communist Party, negative heritage includes the 1957 to 1958 Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Cultural Revolution, and Tiananmen Square Incident.

Regarding the Anti-Rightist Campaign, which was a large-scale suppression of intellectuals, the 90th Anniversary Chronicle gives a negative evaluation, stating "It was necessary to counterattack the attack of the right-wing element, but the anti-right-wing campaign had seriously expanded, and some intellectuals, patriots, and leadership within the party were mistakenly viewed as right-wing. This had unfortunate consequences." However, the negative part that stated "some intellectuals ... This had unfortunate consequences" was deleted from the 100th Anniversary Chronicle, and the Third Historical Resolution followed suit.

Regarding the Cultural Revolution, the passage "After 10 years of the Cultural Revolution, the Party, the nation and the people faced the most serious setbacks and losses since the establishment of a new China." in the 90th Anniversary Chronicle was deleted in the 100th Anniversary Chronicle. In June 1981, when the Cultural Revolution ended, the Gang of Four was arrested and the reform and open-door policy began under Deng Xiaoping. The Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China (Second Historical Resolution) was adopted at the 6th Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party. However, in describing this Resolution, the 90th Anniversary Chronicle stated that "the Cultural Revolution was completely denied." This portion was also deleted from the 100th Anniversary Chronicle.

On the other hand, the Third Historical Resolution evaluated the Cultural Revolution as follows:

"Two counter-revolutionary cliques, Lin Biao and Jiang Qing, used the mistakes of comrade Mao Zedong to commit many wicked acts that would bring disaster to the nation and the people. This caused a decade of civil war. This gave the Party, the nation, and the

people the most serious setbacks and losses since the establishment of new China, and left a tragic lesson.”

In addition, the Resolution stated that “the Party has made a serious policy decision to completely deny the Cultural Revolution” at the 11th Central Committee 3rd Plenum in December 1978, which decided the reform and open-door policy.

In other words, we can see that the evaluation of the Third Historical Resolution on the Cultural Revolution is more negative than the 90th Anniversary Chronicle, let alone the 100th Anniversary Chronicle.

On January 5, 2013, immediately after taking office as General Secretary, Xi Jinping stated that “the history after the reform and open should not deny the previous history.”<sup>iv</sup> Therefore, it seems that Xi has a historical view that tries to affirmatively grasp the negative history of the Mao Zedong era, including the Cultural Revolution. However, the Cultural Revolution evaluation in the Third Historical Resolution likely indicates that there is resistance within the current leadership to “dilute” the history of the Cultural Revolution.

The Tiananmen Square Incident, in which the People's Liberation Army suppressed the democratization movement by force, was represented as follows in a similar fashion in the 90th Anniversary Chronicle and the 100th Anniversary Chronicle:

“Political turmoil broke out in Beijing and other cities when spring became summer, and the Party and the government relied on the people to clearly oppose the upheaval; quell the anti-revolutionary violence in Beijing; defend the socialist national government and the fundamental interests of the people; and ensure that reform, openness, modernization, and construction continue to move forward.”

In addition, the Third Historical Resolution made a somewhat different representation, stating “With the support and instigation of international anti-communist and anti-socialist hostile forces, the international ‘macro-climate’ and domestic ‘micro-climate’ brought serious political turmoil to our country during the transition from spring to summer in 1989. The Party and the government relied on the people to clearly oppose the upheaval to defend the socialist national government and the fundamental interests of the people.” This interpretation emphasizes the existence of “overseas hostile forces” behind the democratization movement.

On the other hand, Xi Jinping mentioned the Tiananmen Square Incident in his speech at the 2nd Plenary Session of the 6th Plenum on November 11, 2021 where the “Third Historical Resolution” was adopted. He said, “We overcame the life-and-death struggle of the Party and the nation and endured the so-called ‘sanction’ pressure of the Western nations.”<sup>v</sup> He touches on the sanctions of Western countries following the Tiananmen

Square Incident, and similar to the existence of “overseas hostile forces” it sets out an evaluation centered on confrontations with the Western democratic camp.

◇Concentration of Power and Personality Cult Direction

The content of Deng Xiaoping's June 16, 1989 talk<sup>vi</sup> with several central leaders was added to the 100th Anniversary Chronicle.

“Every leadership group needs a core of one person. Leadership without such a core is unreliable.”

Xi Jinping was positioned at the core of the Party at the 6th Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party (6th plenum) held on October 24–27, 2016. As the movement toward a cult of personality for Xi Jinping intensifies, it seems that the 100th Anniversary Chronicle has been revised to match the political regime he is aiming for.

On the other hand, according to the 90th Anniversary Chronicle, with the theme of reform of the leadership system of the Party and the nation, in the August 18, 1980 enlarged meeting of the Central Committee Politburo, Deng Xiaoping stated, “We must reform the current system to deal with its harmful effects such as bureaucracy, excessive concentration of power, patriarchy, and life-long system of leadership duties.” It is said that the aim was to reduce the power of rival Hua Guofeng, who concurrently served as the Party Chairman, the Premier, and the chairman of the Central Military Commission, but it denied cult of personality and the concentration of power of the Mao Zedong era.

In the 100th Anniversary Chronicle, the “excessive concentration of power” that was “harmful” and the “life-long system” were deleted and replaced by the revolution in the nation and the leadership system being driven by “Not weakening the party's leadership and loosening the Party's discipline, but to adhere to and strengthen the Party's leadership and discipline.”

This “transformation” seems to be intentional. At the National People's Congress in March 2018, Xi Jinping abolished the presidential term limits from the Deng Xiaoping era, which limited the presidency to two terms (10 years) and is aiming for election to a third term. Therefore, it is highly likely that there is a consensus within the Communist Party to not interpret “concentration of power” or “life-long system” negatively.

The Second Historical Resolution of the Deng Xiaoping era also stipulated “establishment of group guidance (system)” and a “prohibition of cults of personality,” and emphasized that Mao Zedong's politics, which caused great confusion in the country in the Cultural Revolution, should be changed. The Third Historical Resolution does not deny the historical resolutions of the Deng era, stating that they are “still valid,” but

wordings such as the “establishment of group guidance (system)” and a “prohibition of cults of personality” have vanished.

What does this mean? With the Historical Resolutions as well as the Chronicles showing the same trends regarding the political style that Xi Jinping aims for in terms of concentration of power, cult of personality, and other matters, I analyze that there is an attempt to revise the interpretation of the Historical Resolutions of the Deng Xiaoping era by painting over them. By doing so, it seems that a method that justifies Xi Jinping’s own current direction is now in use.

◇ Adherence to Territorial Sovereignty and National Security

Both the 90th Anniversary Chronicle and the 100th Anniversary Chronicle begin with the "history of humiliation" of China being semi-colonized by the invasion of Western powers after the Opium War in 1840. However, the beginning of the 100th Anniversary Chronicle added “The realization of the great resurgence of the Chinese people has become a great dream of all peoples.” With this, Xi Jinping’s slogan was newly added to history. The key term “great resurgence of the Chinese people,” which appeared only twice in the 90th Anniversary Chronicle, appeared 20 times in the 100th Anniversary Chronicle.

The Third Historical Resolution, in which “great resurgence of the Chinese people” appeared 28 times, stated, “Without the Chinese Communist Party, there would be no new China, and no great resurgence of the Chinese people.” The Communist Party of the Xi era and the "great resurgence of the Chinese people" are united.

On the other hand, in foreign policy, Deng Xiaoping remarked “keeping a low profile” on September 4, 1989 after the Tiananmen Square Incident. This meant holding back his power against the drastic changes in the international situation, and the Jiang Zemin administration put it into practice. This “keeping a low profile” noted in the 90th Anniversary Chronicle was removed from the 100th Anniversary Chronicle.

As though to be in line with these changes, the Xi Jinping regime has started to manifest its increasingly belligerent stance, such as strongly insisting on non-negotiable territorial sovereignty principles as “core interests,” deploying a “Wolf Warrior Diplomacy” that loudly opposes criticism of other countries, and undertaking retaliatory measures.

The 100th Anniversary Chronicles adds a new history of "core interests" that was not in the 90th Anniversary Chronicles. The following incidents are examples of this:

▽ January 19–20, 1974 Self-defense attack by People's Liberation Army against the South Vietnamese Army and defense of the Paracel Islands

▽ March 14, 1988 People's Liberation Army's self-defense counterattack in the Spratly Islands

▽ February 25, 1992 The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress passed the Territorial Sea Law (specifying the Senkaku Islands as Chinese territory)

▽ March 8–25, 1996 Missile launch training for the East China Sea and South China Sea and a joint exercise between the Army, Navy and Air Force in the Taiwan Strait

Moreover, the Third Historical Resolution emphasizes that “we resisted extreme external pressure and oppression, and counterattacked. We waged a struggle for Hong Kong, Taiwan, Xinjiang, Tibet, and the oceans, accelerated our development as a maritime power, and effectively maintained national security.” This displayed the policy of fighting to the end and not yielding on national security.

This paper hypothesizes that the Xi Jinping administration is characterized by its setting a future direction by reinterpreting historical facts to justify its policy when implementing a new policy different from the past administration. To the extent of my observation of the 100th Anniversary Chronicles and the Third Historical Resolution, Xi himself has an eye on a long-term administration compared with previous administrations. Furthermore, he obsesses over concentration of power and the cult of personality and demonstrates a strong tenacity towards territorial sovereignty. It can be said that these characteristics hint at his future direction. (End)

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<sup>i</sup> This was adopted on November 11. Its entire text was published in the *People's Daily* on November 17, 2021. It was communicated by the New China News Agency.

<sup>ii</sup> Chinese Communist Party History and Literature Laboratory Chronicle of the Communist Party of China (July 1921-June 2011), *People's Daily*, July 21, 22, 23, 2011. It was communicated by the New China News Agency.

<sup>iii</sup> Chinese Communist Party History and Literature Laboratory, ed. Chronicle of the Communist Party of China (July 1921-June 2021), *People's Daily*, June 28, 29, 30, 2021. It was communicated by the New China News Agency.

<sup>iv</sup> "Unswervingly adhere to and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics, and continue to make progress in practice." *People's Daily*, January 6, 2013.

<sup>v</sup> Xi Jinping "Take history as a mirror, create the future, work hard, and move forward courageously" *Qiushi*, 2022, No. 1.

<sup>vi</sup> He had a talk with Jiang Zemin, Li Peng, Qiao Shi, and others (Literature Research Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, ed. *Chronicles of Deng Xiaoping* Last Volume, CCCPC Party Literature Publishing House. 2004, page 1281).