

Introduction

In December 2008 China celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the landmark third plenary session of the Eleventh Central Committee, which marked the ascendancy of Deng Xiaoping and the beginning of the post-Mao reform period.

China has made great economic progress during the subsequent three decades of reform and opening. This year China's GDP is poised to overtake that of Japan and in just 20 years, of the US. Internally, economic reform has brought great economic and social benefits and has lifted several hundred million people above the poverty line. The country is led by a communist party that has undergone a process of revitalization and rejuvenation. The Party, through its appointment system, controls a cadre corps of 42 million who seem much more able and competent than cadres and bureaucrats during Mao's time. In the diplomatic arena, China also has had significant achievements in various regions of the world, including Latin America and Africa. The current financial crisis has underscored the fact that China now also plays a global role and must be engaged on major issues, in particular in Asia, but also in relation to current attempts to reestablish the vitality of the global economy.

However, problems remain and it is not at all clear that Chinese reforms entail a linear process towards democracy, pluralism and a market economy. Undoubtedly, China can no longer be characterized as a totalitarian or dictatorial system. It has developed into a hybrid regime and as comparative political studies show such a regime can remain so for a long time and prove rather immune to political change. There have also been some unintended consequences of reform. For example, following Zhu Rongji's administrative reform in 1997-98, a number of Chinese business groups emerged that have developed into independent fiefdoms that no longer are easily controlled by the state. They are very profitable but retain their profits rather than contribute to the funding of health care, pension and other welfare provisions for workers and staff. In agriculture the critical issue is still whether China can provide sufficient food, especially grain, to feed its own growing population. Environmental damages, lack of water and the physical loss of arable land highlight the food security risk. In the area of foreign policy, China has increased its influence in the Asian region and has entered a number of trade agreements (FTAs) with neighbouring

countries. China now also has a strong and increasing presence in Latin America and Africa. Relations with the US are as good as ever, whereas there are noticeable frictions in relations with Japan and especially the EU. China has benefited from globalization, as has the West. Whether the integration of global markets will continue and what the likely impact will be for China's continued reform process are open, albeit important, questions.

These issues were at the centre of an international workshop held at the Asia Research Centre, Copenhagen Business School (CBS), with the participation of Professors Robert F. Ash (SOAS, London), Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard (Asia Research Centre, CBS), François Godement (Asia Centre at Sciences Po, Paris), Peter Nolan (Cambridge University), David Shambaugh (George Washington University), Dr Carl Walter (J. P. Morgan, China) and Assistant Professor Yang Jiang (Asia Research Centre, CBS). This special issue of the *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* contains the revised papers, except for David Shambaugh's paper which will appear in a forthcoming issue of the *Copenhagen Discussion Papers*.

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